GOODNIGHT PUNPUN

2

INIO ASANO

PARENTAL ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

GOODNIGHT PUNPUN

2

Story and Art by INIO ASANO

GOODNIGHT PUNPUN

Part Three

STORY THUS FAR...

Punpun, somehow, has become an unexceptional middle school student.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PUNPUN ONODERA
Formerly known as Punpun Punyama. A choco pie-loving young man.

MAMA ONODERA
Punpun's mother. Her personality remains unchanged post-divorce.

YUICHI ONODERA
Mama's younger brother. Thirty-three years old. Lives with Punpun.

AIKO TANAKA
The girl Punpun loved in elementary school. They have had absolutely no contact for two years.

KOMATSU
Punpun's classmate. A proud natural righty and member of the badminton team.

SEKI
Punpun's classmate. Has a slightly alcoholic father.

SHIMIZU
Punpun's classmate. Childhood friend of Seki.

THIS GUY
Varsity member of the badminton team.

YUGAMI
The lawyer who handled Mama's divorce.

GIRL IN THE COFFEE SHOP
Uncle Yuichi thinks he remembers her from somewhere..?!

CONTENTS

Chapter 24 5
Chapter 25 21
Chapter 26 37
Chapter 27 53
Chapter 28 71
Chapter 29 87
Chapter 30 105
Chapter 31 127
Chapter 32 143
Chapter 33 161
Chapter 34 181

KOH! DO YOU HAVE YOUR SCARF...?
WRAP UP OR YOU'LL GET SICK!
I PUT YOUR ALLOWANCE IN YOUR BAG!

I'M MAKING YOUR FAVORITE FOR DINNER, SO HURRY HOME, OKAY?!
WHAT DO YOU SAY?!
YES, MOM!!
I WILL!!

HAVE A GOOD DAY!

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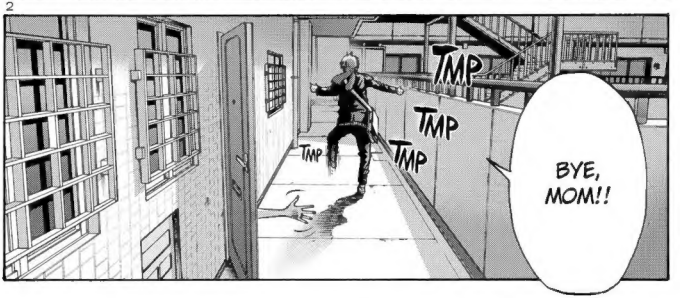
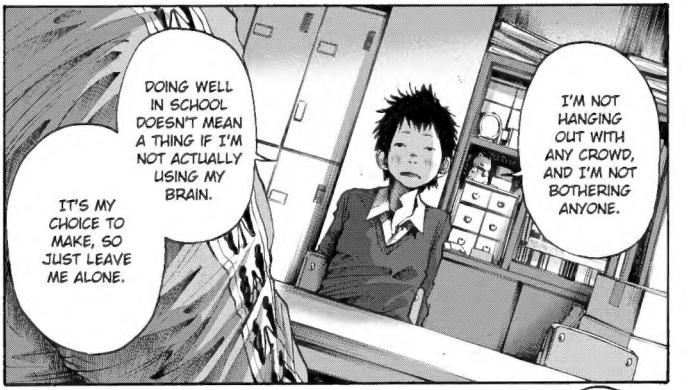

TMP
TMP
TMP
TMP
BYE, MOM!!

DDLE
GUIDANCE COUNSELOR
SEKI, LISTEN CAREFULLY— I'M TELLING YOU SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

TAP TAP TAP
THE TARDINESS, THE ABSENCES... YOU'VE BARELY BEEN TO CLASS THIS SEMESTER...
...AND YOUR GRADES HAVE FALLEN NOTICEABLY COMPARED TO FIRST SEMESTER.
TAP TAP
ARE YOU HANGING OUT WITH A BAD CROWD?
SIR...
TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP


I'M NOT HANGING OUT WITH ANY CROWD, AND I'M NOT BOTHERING ANYONE.
DOING WELL IN SCHOOL DOESN'T MEAN A THING IF I'M NOT ACTUALLY USING MY BRAIN.
IT'S MY CHOICE TO MAKE, SO JUST LEAVE ME ALONE.

SEKI, THE WORLD ISN'T AS EASY AS YOU THINK IT IS.
THE REALLY SMART KIDS MANAGE TO HAVE FRIENDS *AND* STAY ON TOP OF THEIR CLASSES.
I'M TELLING YOU, BASED ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE, GO TO HIGH SCHOOL AND THINK ABOUT WHAT...
SIR!

ARE YOU ALLOWED TO JUST TELL ME PERSONAL STUFF LIKE THAT?
AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO BE TALKING ABOUT ME?
YOU SHOULDN'T ASSUME YOUR EXPERIENCE IS RELEVANT TO EVERYONE.
OR ARE YOU SAYING THAT SMART GROWN-UPS ARE JUST GOOD AT CHANGING THE SUBJECT?
ALL RIGHT, I GET IT.
OKAY.
BUT MY BOOZER DAD IS WORSE THAN I AM.
SKREECH
WE'LL SCHEDULE A SPECIAL MEETING WITH YOUR PARENTS TO MAKE SURE YOU TELL THEM.
NEVER MIND...
YOU CAN LEAVE NOW.

I'M A REBELLIOUS TEEN.
GIGH...
WHAT A CLICHÉ...
SHIMIZU?

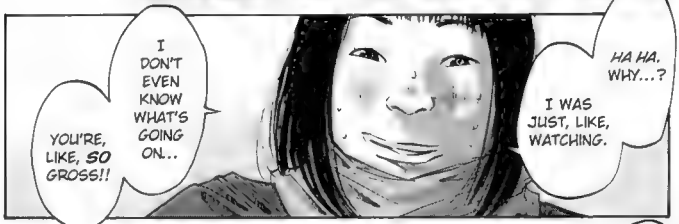
HUH?!

THAT'S A TOTAL LIE! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
SHIMIZU *WANTED* TO GIVE IT TO ME!
MONEY IS SOMETHING YOU WORK FOR, RIGHT?
W-WHAT?! I DON'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT YOUR MORAL PHILOSOPHY!
WHATEVER, I DON'T HAVE TO STAND HERE AND BE LECTURED BY A BONEHEAD LIKE YOU!
YOU'RE ALWAYS WANDERING AROUND IN YOUR BOGUS SOLITUDE...
IT'S A PERFECTLY LEGITIMATE EXAMPLE OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND!
IDIOTS SHOULDN'T TRY TO BE HEROES!

WHAM
THUD
S-SEKI!
DON'T BLAME ABE!
I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY! IT'S ALL MY FAULT!
SEKI, SEKI!

THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!
FROM SKY. SH
THAT'S NOT IT... AAARGH!
IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, IT'S OBVIOUS. AARGH!
THUD
THUD
THUD

I DON'T CARE THAT YOU'RE A GIRL.
YOU'RE NEXT.


I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON...
YOU'RE, LIKE, SO GROSS!!
HA HA. WHY...?
I WAS JUST, LIKE, WATCHING.

WHO-
OSH
ACTUALLY, SO PATHETIC.
THAT'S SUPPOSED TO SCARE ME?
SHK
SHK
SHK
LIKE, SUPER PATHETIC ...
IT'S LIKE, WHAT ARE YOU EVEN TALKING ABOUT?

HUH? ...
WHAT?
WHAT IS IT?
HA HA HA! SERIOUSLY?! HOW PATHETIC!!
HE'S AFRAID OF A LITTLE FLAME!!

SERIOUSLY, SEKI...
THAT'S SO ENTER-TAINING.
MY DOG REACTS THE SAME WAY.
AND IT'S NOT GOOD FOR DOGS TO GET ABOVE THEM-SELVES...
IF YOU CAN'T FIT IN...
...YOU SHOULD JUST DIE.

THUD

I'M SORRY.

I JUST WANTED ...
...TO BE BETTER FRIENDS WITH THEM...
HEY, SEKI...
...I...
I GET IT NOW.
I'M STUPID, YOU'RE STUPID, WE'RE ALL STUPID...
IMPOS-SIBLE.
WHY DON'T THINGS EVER WORK OUT?
AAAH...
SO? CAN YOU STILL SEE GOD?
WHEN WE WERE IN GRADE SCHOOL, YOU USED TO SAY THAT YOU COULD SEE GOD, RIGHT?
HEY, SHIMIZU ...

NOT...
...
ANYMORE.
NUH-
UH.

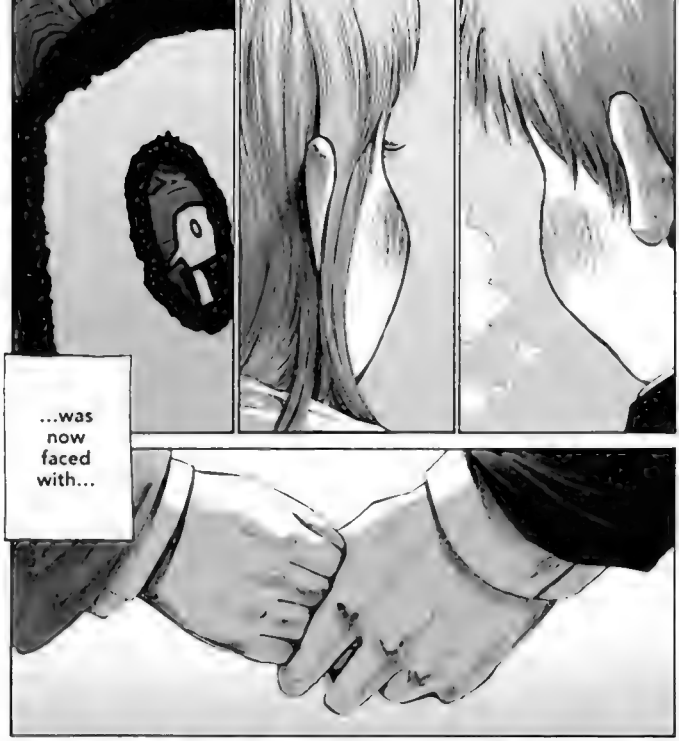
I FIGURED. IF GOD ACTUALLY EXISTED, THE WORLD WOULDN'T BE LIKE THIS.
SEKI...
DON'T YOU EVER GET LONELY BEING BY YOURSELF ALL THE TIME?
PEOPLE JUST NEED TO RELY ON THEM-SELVES.
IF YOU...
IF YOU BELIEVE IN ME...
...I SWEAR I'LL ALWAYS PROTECT YOU.

I DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE ANYMORE...

OKAY.

★· Chapter 25 ★·

So this middle school kid named Punpun...
...firmly believed that Aiko Tanaka, the girl with the small warm hands, was his destiny.
However, this young man...
...who had nurtured his love very patiently for more than two years...

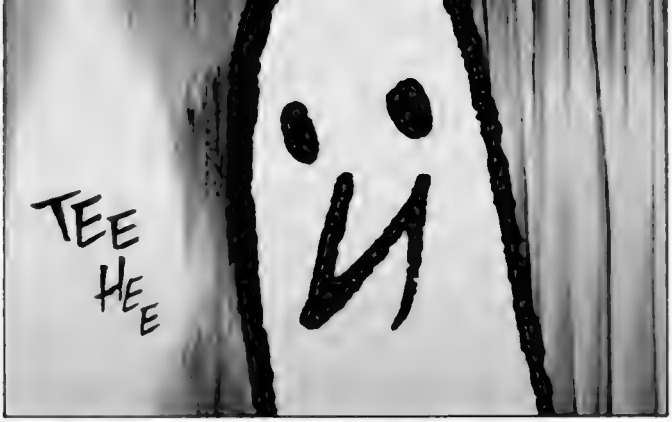

...was now faced with...

...an immutable fact!

GOAL!

It's
hell!

I'M HOME!!
AAAH... I'M SO TIRED...
YUICHI, WHERE'S DINNER?
AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M MAKING IT RIGHT NOW.
WHERE'S PUNPUN?!
HE'S BEEN IN HIS ROOM EVER SINCE HE GOT HOME FROM SCHOOL.
GEEZ, THAT KID!
WHY IS HE SUCH A DOWNER? HE BRINGS ME DOWN TOO!
HAVE YOU BEEN DRINKING AGAIN?

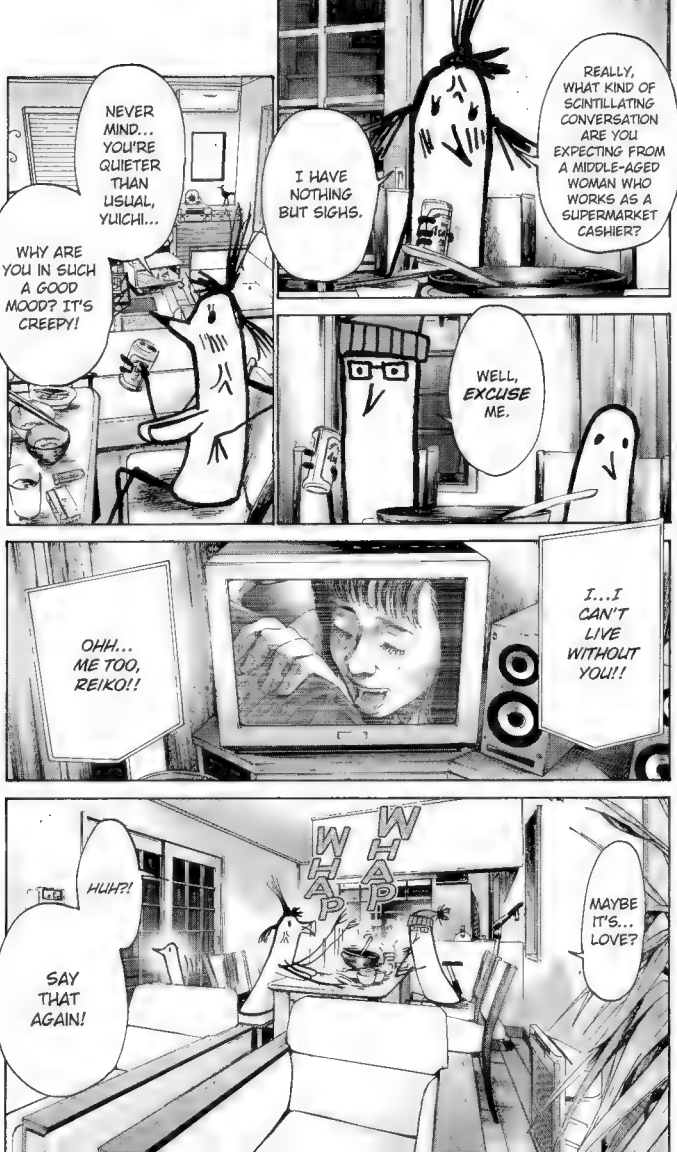

TEE
HEE

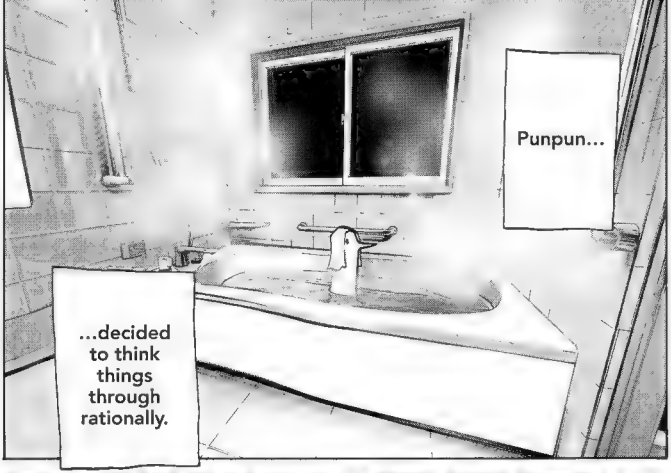
TEE HEE
Punpun decided...

But that was impossible.
...to pretend that he hadn't seen what he saw.

FLAIL
FLAIL
FLAIL
FLAIL
PEW
PEW
PEW
PEW
Punpun decided to forget everything.
"If Aiko is happy, that's all that matters..."
That was impossible.

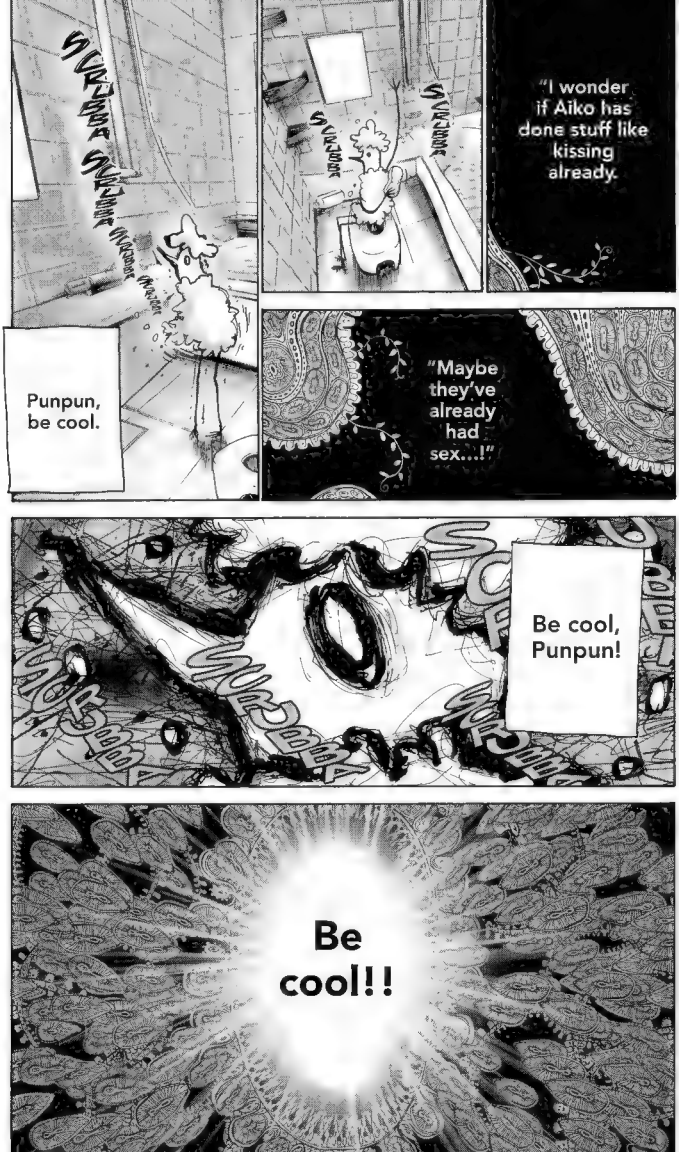
TODAY I PRESENT TO YOU THE UNEXPECTED ...
...TOMATO HOT POT.
UMM...
...I REALLY LOVE YOU!
OH... OHH, I...
...BUT IT'S ANOTHER TREACHEROUS DINNER HOUR HERE...
WELL... I GUESS THERE'S NO POINT BRINGING IT UP NOW...
I LOVE YOU!
SO HOW'S WORK? ARE YOU HAVING FUN?


REALLY, WHAT KIND OF SCINTILLATING CONVERSATION ARE YOU EXPECTING FROM A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN WHO WORKS AS A SUPERMARKET CASHIER?
I HAVE NOTHING BUT SIGHS.
NEVER MIND... YOU'RE QUIETER THAN USUAL, YUICHI...
WHY ARE YOU IN SUCH A GOOD MOOD? IT'S CREEPY!
WELL, EXCUSE ME.
I...I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU!!
OHH... ME TOO, REIKO!!
WHAP WHAP WHAP
HUH?!
SAY THAT AGAIN!
MAYBE IT'S... LOVE?

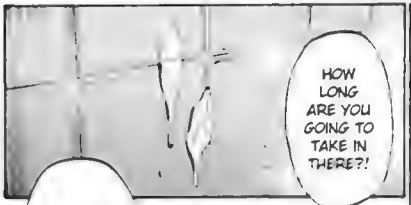


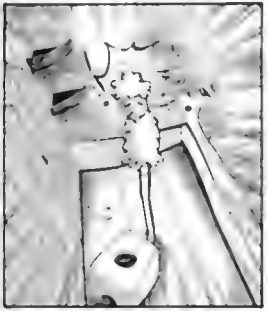
There was no positive proof that Aiko and Yaguchi were going out!

That's right, way to go! Punpun's playing it cool!
That's right, Punpun's super-cool!
"Even if they are going out, there's no way Aiko is that into Yaguchi!"


SCRUBBA SCRUBBER SCRUBBER SCRUBBER
Punpun, be cool.
SCRUBBER SCRUBBER SCRUBBER
"I wonder if Aiko has done stuff like kissing already.
"Maybe they've already had sex...!"
Be cool, Punpun!
Be cool!!

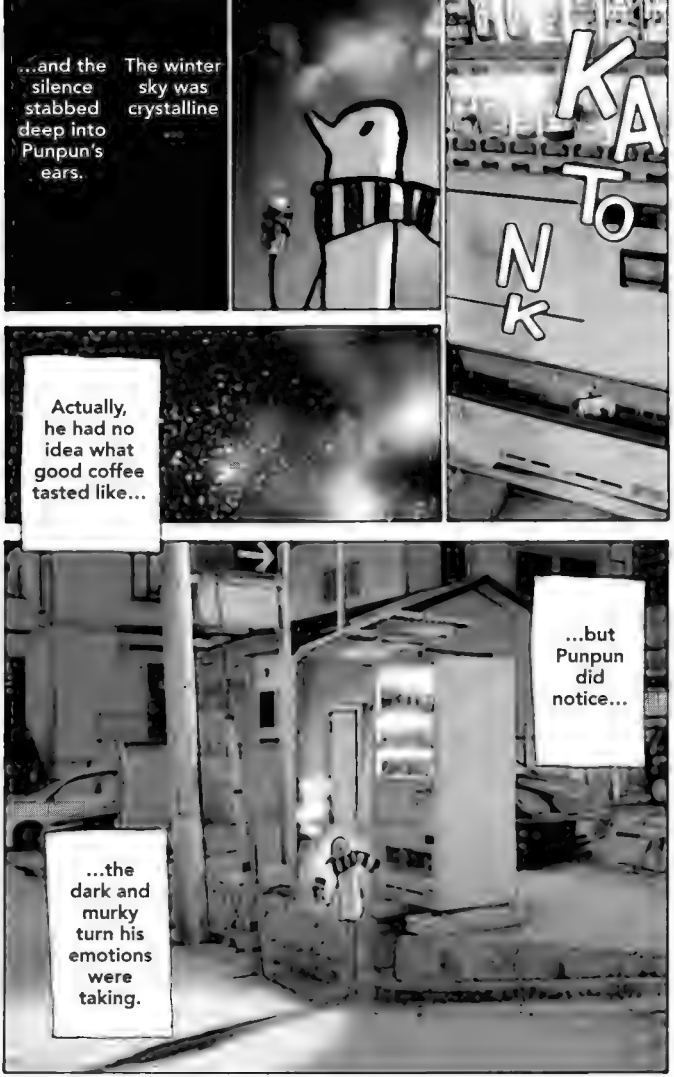
...PUNPUN!

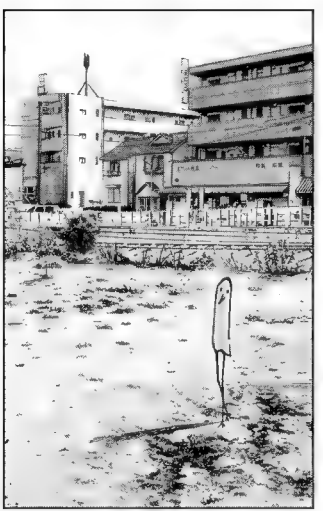

HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE IN THERE?!

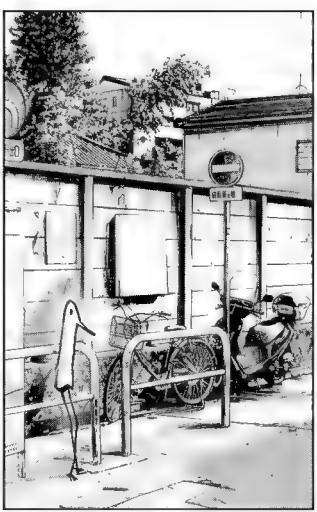


I'M EXHAUSTED. I WANT TO TAKE MY BATH AND GO TO BED.

OH YEAH, THERE'S A LETTER FOR YOU.
HOW CONSCI-ENTIOUS OF HIM...
...WRITING YOU ABOUT HIS BORING LIFE EVERY MONTH WITHOUT FAIL.
The letter was from Punpun's dad, who had returned to Fukushima Prefecture and was working as a security guard at the water department.
It ended in the usual way.
It covered the usual banal subjects— the Yomiuri Giants and outer space.


...and the silence stabbed deep into Punpun's ears.
The winter sky was crystalline ...
KATONK
Actually, he had no idea what good coffee tasted like...
...but Punpun did notice...
...the dark and murky turn his emotions were taking.



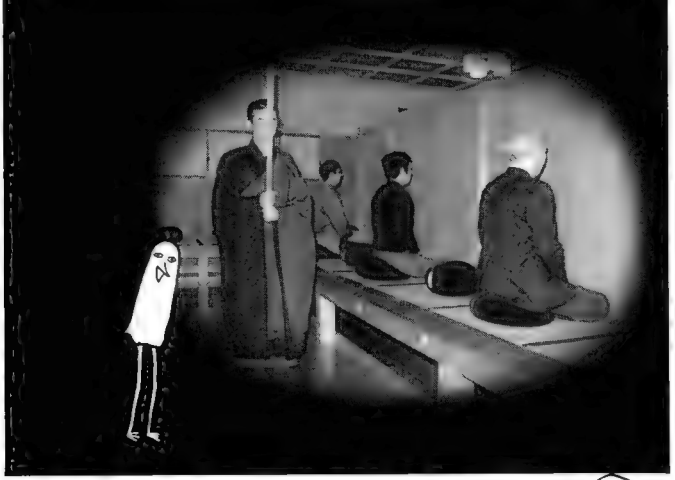


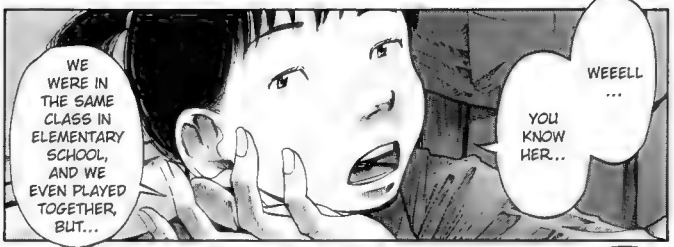
...
...THAT'S IT FOR HOME-ROOM.
CLASS CHAIR, DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?
NO, I DON'T.
ALL RIGHT.
BE CAREFUL GOING HOME.
GOODBYE, EVERYONE.

BRRR ...
IT'S SO COLD.
I SHOULD HAVE GONE TO PRIVATE SCHOOL.
SERIOUSLY, HURRY UP AND DECIDE!
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SAID WE SHOULD ALL GO AWAY FOR SPRING BREAK.
I NEED TO GO TO PRACTICE... CAN I DO IT TOMORROW?
OH GEEZ!!

KOMATSU, DO YOU REALLY LOVE BADMINTON THAT MUCH?!
WHEN DID YOU BECOME SUCH A JOCK?! HERE, GIVE THAT TO ME!
HUH?
... YAGUCHI? FROM BADMINTON?
HOT SPRINGS DAY TRIP
YEAH, HE'S TOTALLY YOUR TYPE, SONO.
I HEAR HE HAS A HUGE DICK.
IT'S LIKE A KING OYSTER MUSHROOM.

I WASN'T ASKING ABOUT THAT, YOU IDIOT!
SM
ACK
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN...
...SHALLOW BOYS LIKE THAT.
HE'S GOT A LOAD OF FIRST-YEAR FANGIRLS...
MAYBE HE'S DOING IT WITH ALL OF THEM.
LICK
LICK
OH...
BUT ISN'T YAGUCHI...
...GOING OUT WITH AIKO TANAKA?



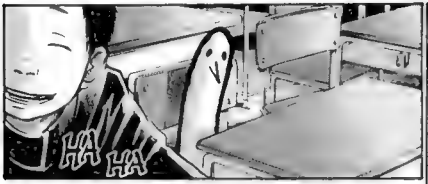

WEEELL ...
YOU KNOW HER...
WE WERE IN THE SAME CLASS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND WE EVEN PLAYED TOGETHER, BUT...

...I COULD NEVER TELL WHAT SHE WAS THINKING.
SOMETIMES I USED TO GET IRRITATED THAT SHE NEVER OPENED UP.
SHE GOES STRAIGHT HOME AFTER SCHOOL, RIGHT?

MAYBE SHE'S A HOOKER.
THAT'S SICK..
THE TWO OF THEM ARE PROBABLY JUST GOING AT IT ALL THE TIME.

HONESTLY, I DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH HER ANY-MORE...
PLUS, HER FAMILY'S IN THAT WEIRD CULT.
GULP
MY MOM SAID THEY TRIED TO SELL HER SOME MAGIC WATER.
WOW...
...AIKO TANAKA IS THE WORST.
"Aiko Tanaka is the worst."

AH
HA
YEAH, SHE IS!
HA
HA
HA


HA
HA

TA
HA
HA

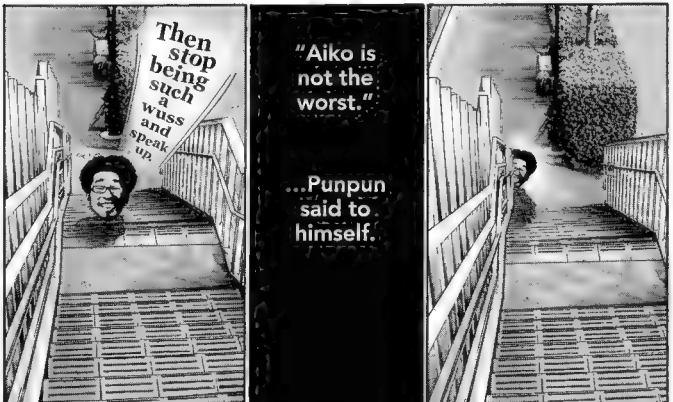
AH
HA
HA
HA
HA

HUH?
AREN'T YOU COMING TO PRACTICE, PUNPUN?
Punpun...
OH, OKAY.
SEE YOU LATER.

...didn't want to be around anyone.

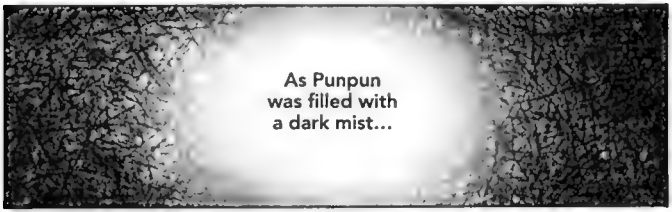
路線
ROUTE

COWARD!


Then stop being such a wuss and speak up.
"Aiko is not the worst."
...Punpun said to himself.

Punpun was sure that Yaguchi was leading Aiko astray.

I got it! Kill him!

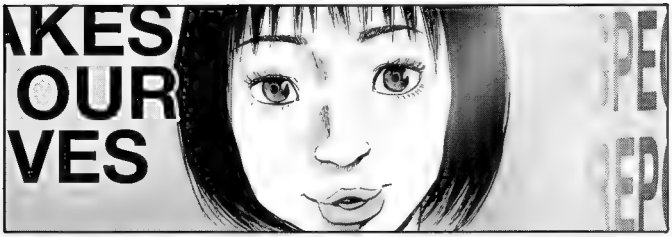

As Punpun was filled with a dark mist...

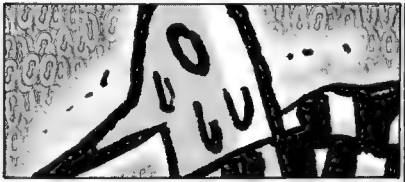
...seemed to fade and recede...
...his memories of Aiko from two years ago...

A-i-k-o!

I want to talk to you again!
I want to hold hands with you again!
I want to smooch you again!

I want to see inside your panties...!

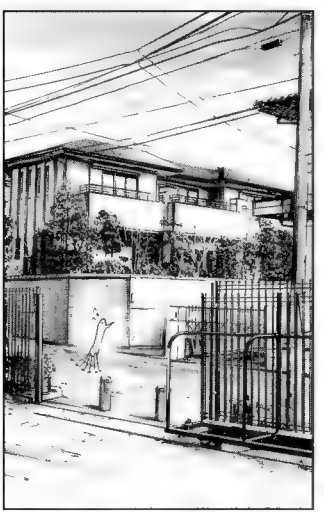

AKES
OUR
VES



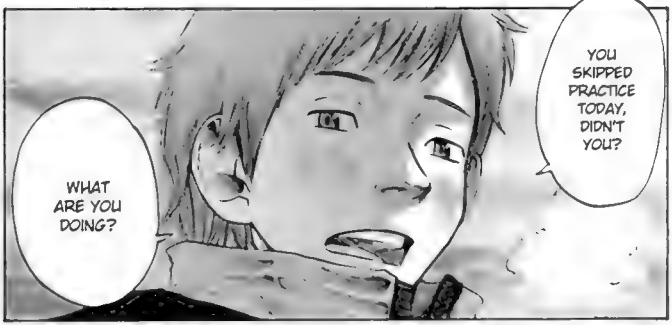
HOT GIRLS!
ぼんぼん倶
HOT OUTTAKES FROM OUR ARCHIVES
¥690[+]
SPECIAL REPORT: TEENAGE DEBAUCHERY!
SHIKURO MORIKA
ADULTS ONLY

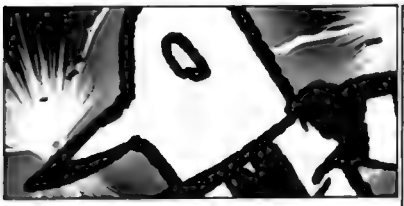
SPECIAL REPORT: TEENAGE DEBAUCHERY!

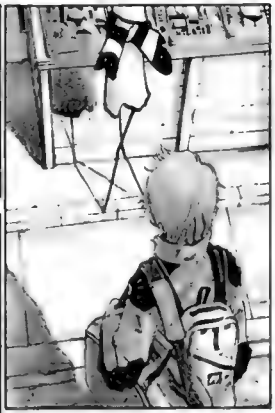
HEEEY!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YOU SKIPPED PRACTICE TODAY, DIDN'T YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
UEHARA BOOKS
Kill him!



HEEEY!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?


YOU SKIPPED PRACTICE TODAY, DIDN'T YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

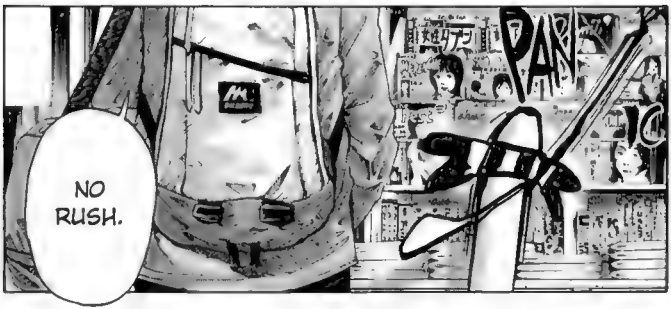




Kill him!

WELL...
WE ALL HAVE OFF DAYS...
I GET IT.
UMM, SORRY...
...YOUR NAME'S NOT OZAWA, NOT ODA-JIMA...
UEHARA BOOKS
... ONODERA!
SERIOUSLY, DUDE, YOU AREN'T VERY MEMORABLE.

YOU ON YOUR WAY HOME, ONODERA?
LET'S WALK TOGETHER.
IF YOU NEED TO BUY A MAGAZINE, I CAN WAIT OUT HERE.
I'VE GOT A THING TO DO OVER THAT WAY.

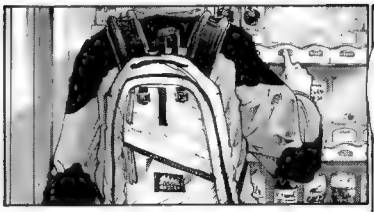

NO RUSH.

I SUCK AT STUDYING. BADMINTON HAS BEEN MY THING SINCE I WAS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL...
MANAGEMENT WEEKLY
...GETTING SOMETHING LIKE THAT...
HEY, YOU MUST BE SMART...

...because this guy was trying to lead Aiko astray.
IF I DON'T GET AN ATHLETIC SCHOLAR-SHIP, MY LIFE IS SERIOUSLY SCREWED.
I REALLY NEED TO WIN THE CHAMPION-SHIP, NO MATTER WHAT...
Punpun had pulled off a slick maneuver, but he couldn't relax yet...
Obviously, he's scum!
OH!
Whoa, that was close!

A narrow miss!
He almost got stabbed when he turned around!

Good going, Punpun!



MIND IF I GRAB SOMETHING TO DRINK?
SORRY ...

NO!

SHOOT HIM!
KA
THONK

HERE!
IT'S FREEZING TODAY...
...SO DRINK UP.
The eyes! Aim for the eyes!
IT'S GETTING A LITTLE COLD FOR THE FIRST-YEARS TO PRACTICE OUTSIDE...

I FEEL BAD THAT YOU GUYS HAVE TO DO BORING DRILLS...
...BUT THE CAPTAIN AND THE MANAGER ARE SO RIGID ABOUT THINGS LIKE TRADITION AND HIERARCHY.
I GUESS I COULD MAKE MORE OF A FUSS, BUT THEY SEE ME AS A LIGHT-WEIGHT...
...SO THEY DON'T TAKE ME SERIOUSLY EVEN THOUGH I'M THE BEST OF THE SECOND-YEARS!
BUT SERIOUSLY ...
KOMATSU FROM FIRST YEAR IS AMAZING...
YOU SHOW HIM ONE THING AND HE ABSORBS TEN OR TWENTY, YOU KNOW?
HE'S SERIOUSLY A BADMINTON GENIUS.
NOD
NOD
WHEN I THINK ABOUT HOW HIS NATURAL ABILITY IS MAKING ALL MY EFFORT SEEM ABSOLUTELY WORTHLESS...

I HONESTLY WONDER WHY...
...I'VE BEEN TRYING SO HARD.
I THOUGHT IF I COULD RACE UP THE NATIONAL JUNIORS TOURNAMENT RANKS...
...AND BECOME A STAR ATHLETE, I'D BE HAPPY NO MATTER HOW THE REST OF MY LIFE TURNED OUT.

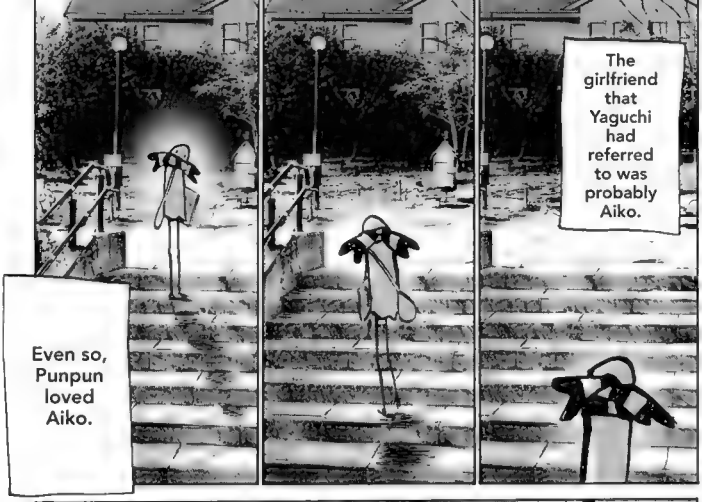
BUT IT TURNS OUT I'M NOT ACTUALLY A GENIUS.
I'M JUST A PRETTY AVERAGE GUY.

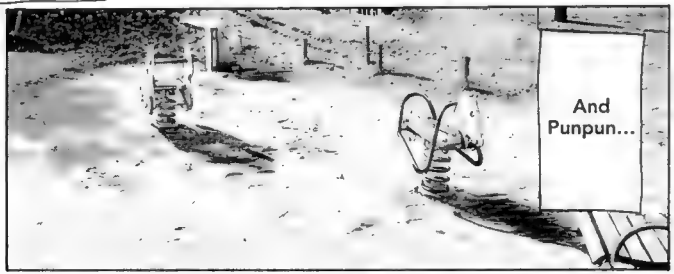
YOU KNOW...
...MAYBE AN AVERAGE GUY WOULD BE HAPPIER WITH AN AVERAGE GOAL?
OH, SORRY TO GO ON LIKE THAT! NEVER MIND!
NOD
NOD
LET'S TALK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

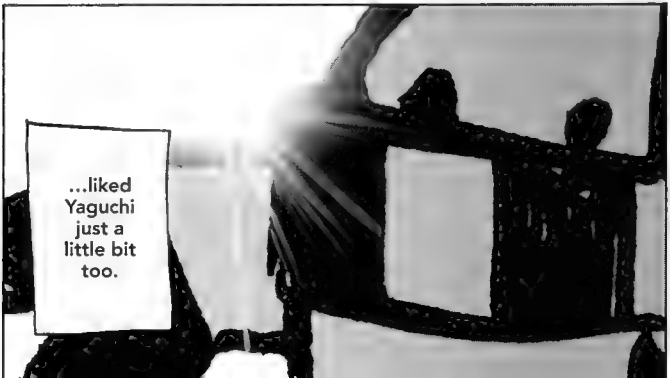
I...
DO YOU LIKE ANYONE, ONODERA?
ACTU-ALLY, I...
... RECENTLY GOT MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND.
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO HER. JUST HOLDING HER HAND MAKES ME SUPER NERVOUS!
SHE'S ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT.
MAYBE THAT'S WHY I CAN'T BEAT KOMATSU.
GYAACK! SORRY!
IT GOT DEPRESSING AGAIN!

OH...
...THIS IS MY STOP.
SAITO ORTHOPEDIC CLINI
CLOSED MONDAY
TUES—FRI 9AM—7PM
SAT, SUN 9AM—5PM
HUH? OHH!
IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS, SO DON'T TELL ANYONE.
COME TO MORNING PRACTICE TOMORROW, OKAY?
ZOD
ZOD
OH, AND ONE MORE THING!

DO YOU THINK I'M PATHETIC...
...BECAUSE MAKING HER HAPPY IS WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY?
SORRY, NEVER MIND. YOU'RE SUCH A GOOD LISTENER!
LET'S HANG OUT AGAIN!
Yaguchi's smile reminded Punpun of Harumi, a friend from long ago.


The girlfriend that Yaguchi had referred to was probably Aiko.
Even so, Punpun loved Aiko.

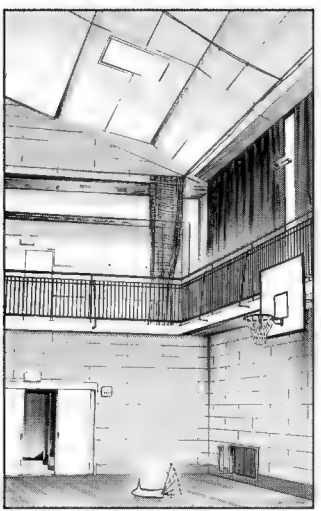

And Punpun...

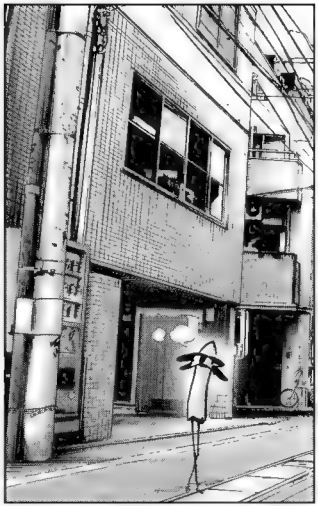

...liked Yaguchi just a little bit too.

...but Punpun wondered who would welcome his love.

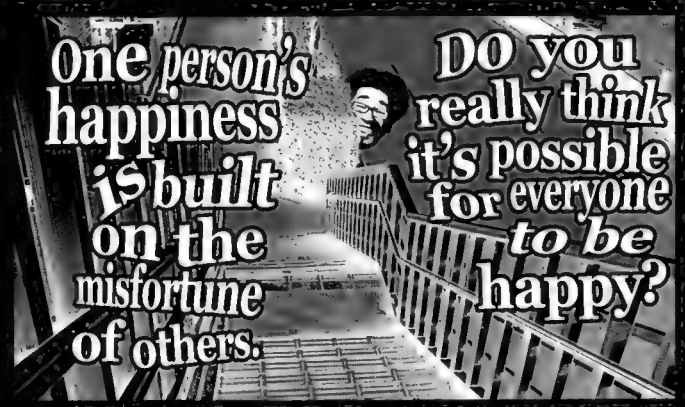
...wanted Yaguchi to find happiness, no matter how modest...

SHLK
SHLK
SHLK
SHLK
SHLK
He didn't know what to do anymore!
FAP
FAP
FAP
FAP
FAP
He didn't know!

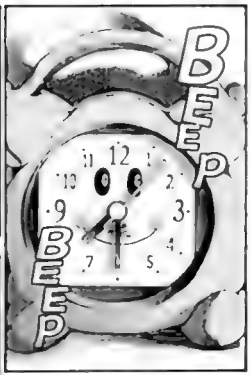




Punpun, you're a good kid.
It makes me want to puke.


One person's happiness is built on the misfortune of others.
DO you really think it's possible for everyone to be happy?

...do you know the best way to keep from getting hurt by other people?
Hey, wimpy hypocrite Punpun...
No matter how good you are, you still inadvertently hurt other people. Or are you saying that you're strong enough to take on the entire world's sadness?
Kill them first.


BEEP
BEEP

BEEP BEEP

BEEP
BEEP

BANG
BANG
PUNPUUUN!
YOU'RE GOING TO BE LATE FOR PRACTICE!
BANG
BANG
GAAH!
HE TOTALLY IGNORED ME!
WHAT'S *WITH* HIM?! IS HE REBELLING? SO ANNOYING!
YUP, RIGHT UP THERE WITH YOUR MENOPAUSE.
DASH

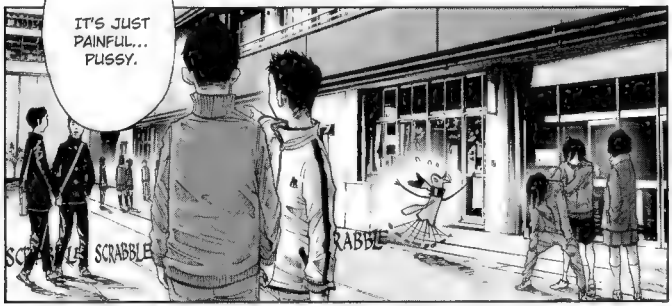
SWISH
SQUEAK
SQUEAK

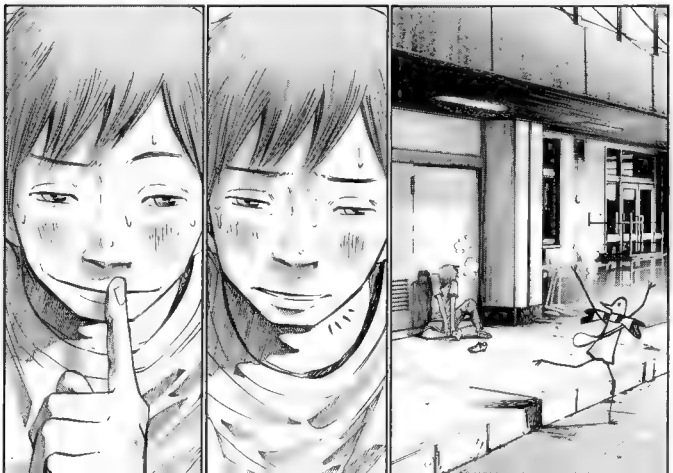
WHA CK

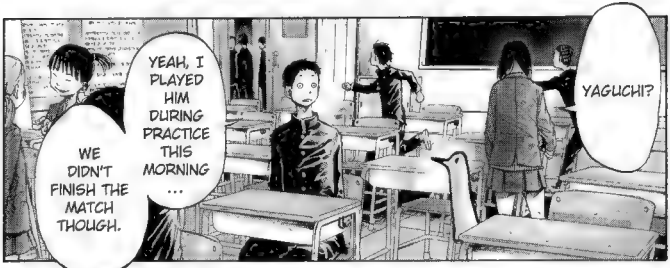
WE FINALLY GET IN THE GYM, AND ALL WE'RE DOING IS REFEREEING.
IT'S TOO EARLY FOR THIS! PUSSY, PUSSY!
13
0
7

YAGUCHI...
WILL YOU PLEASE TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY?
AH HA...
HA HA HA!
COACH ...
...CAN I TAKE A QUICK BREAK?
SORRY, MY BAD!
I REALLY HAVE TO PEE!

NO WAY HE'S GOING TO WIN THE NORTHERN PREFECTURE TOURNA-MENT.
EVEN IF HE MAKES IT TO THE FINALS, HE'LL BE UP AGAINST KOMATSU...
WHACK
WHACK
MAN, YAGUCHI IS ON THE DECLINE.
HE'S ALWAYS BEEN THE BEST IN THE CITY, BUT HE'S NO MATCH FOR KOMATSU.


IT'S JUST PAINFUL... PUSSY.
SCRABBLE
SCRABBLE
SCRABBLE




YAGUCHI?
YEAH, I PLAYED HIM DURING PRACTICE THIS MORNING ...
WE DIDN'T FINISH THE MATCH THOUGH.

WHAT? GO EASY ON HIM?
WHY WOULD I GO EASY ON YAGUCHI?
YOU!!

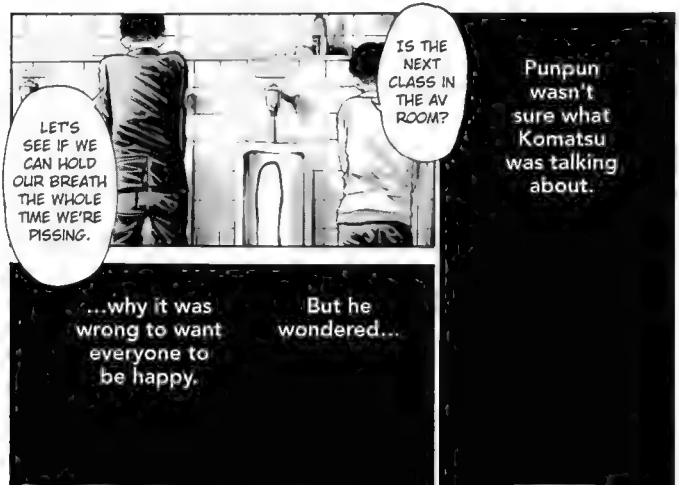
PUNPUN ...
...THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME, SO LET ME TRY TO EXPLAIN...
WHEN YOU'RE ON THE COURT, WINNING OR LOSING IS THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON WITH YAGUCHI ...
...BUT IF HE STEPS ON THE COURT, IF ANYONE DOES, I WILL DEMOLISH THEM WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT.
THAT'S MY CODE.

AND IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT SPORTS...
WHEN WE'RE STANDING ON THE COURT OF LIFE, WE SHOULD PLAY HARD FOR THE UPPER HAND.
PEOPLE LOVE WORDS LIKE "EQUALITY" AND "PEACE"...
...BUT AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THOSE'RE JUST OPIATES FOR THE LOSERS.

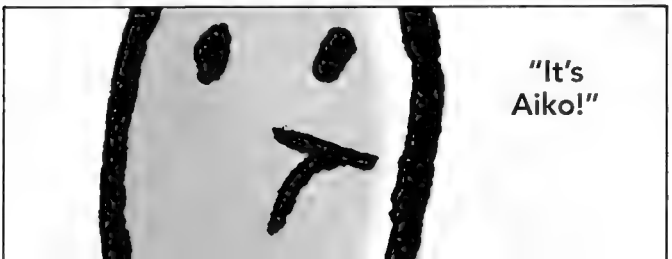
HUMAN HISTORY IS PROPELLED BY CONFLICT.
THAT'S HOW LANGUAGES AND CULTURES ARE BORN, HOW WE'RE EVEN HERE TO EXPERIENCE OUR JOYS AND SORROWS.
IF HAVING PERFECT EQUALITY COMES AT THE COST OF THE INDIVIDUAL...
...DO YOU THINK THAT CAN REALLY LEAD TO TRUE HAPPINESS?
ONLY ROCKS ON A RIVERBANK CAN GET ALONG EQUALLY—SAME SIZE, SAME PRESSURES.
IF YOU DON'T WANT CONFLICT, GO TO A DESERTED ISLAND.
THAT'S RIGHT! WINNING AND LOSING ARE LIFE ITSELF!
IT MAKES YOUR CELLS AND YOUR SOUL THROB!
THAT'S WHY I ALWAYS GO FULL TILT...
...SO THAT I CAN EXPERIENCE THE ULTIMATE VICTORY OR DEFEAT!
PUNPUN, YOU IGNORANT PACIFIST...
ARE YOU GOING TO DIE WITHOUT EVER KNOWING THE JOY OF TRULY LIVING?

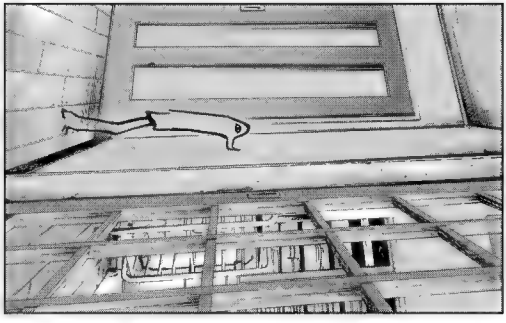
"THE JOY OF LIVING!"


Punpun wasn't sure what Komatsu was talking about.
IS THE NEXT CLASS IN THE AV ROOM?
LET'S SEE IF WE CAN HOLD OUR BREATH THE WHOLE TIME WE'RE PISSING.
But he wondered...
...why it was wrong to want everyone to be happy.

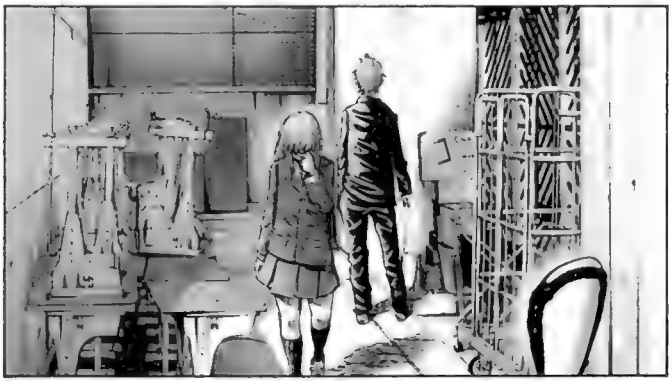
If it turned out that everyone else was an alien from another planet...

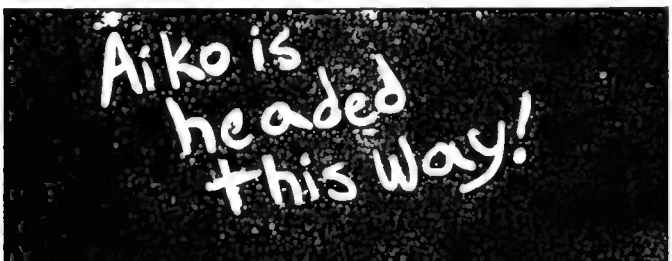
...Punpun would, in his current state, have no trouble believing it.

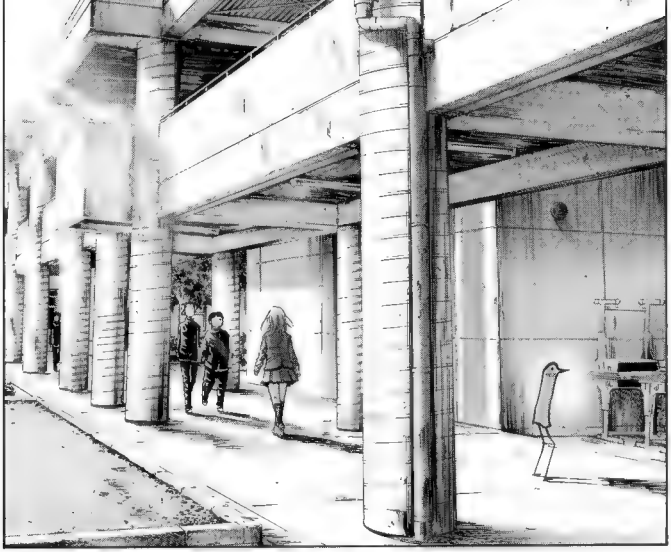

"It's Aiko!"

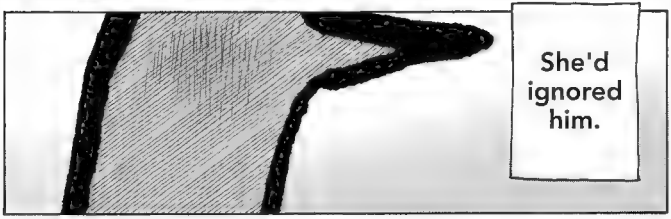


Aiko is crying!



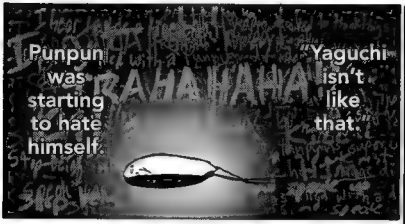

Aiko is headed this way!




She'd ignored him.

Punpun was sick of his own optimism.
"That would be... good..."
"Oh, of course! In the last two years, Aiko's eyesight has really deteriorated.
Punpun knew there must be a good reason.
No way. Aiko wasn't that mean.

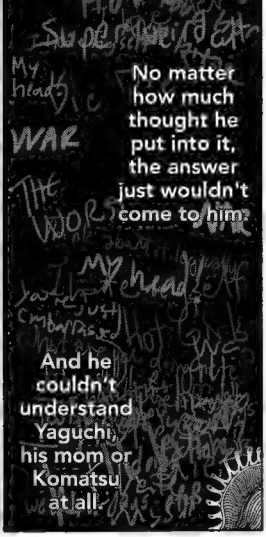
Oh, that's it! Aiko had feelings for me all this time, but Yaguchi coerced her into going out with him. Plus he must've threatened her if she talked to other guys. Of course that must be it!



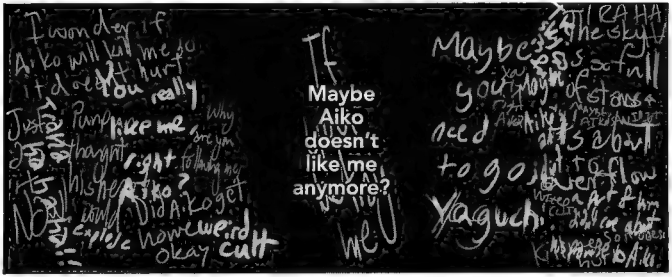
What a lowlife— Yaguchi is just scum! The jealous monster! Maybe I should hit him on the head from behind?

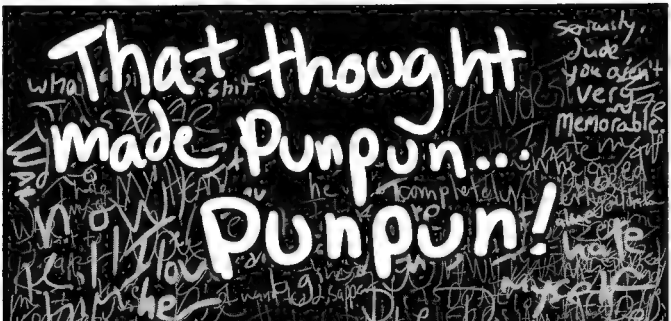
But if Aiko was crying, then Yaguchi must have done something to make her sad. Punpun really wanted to know what.

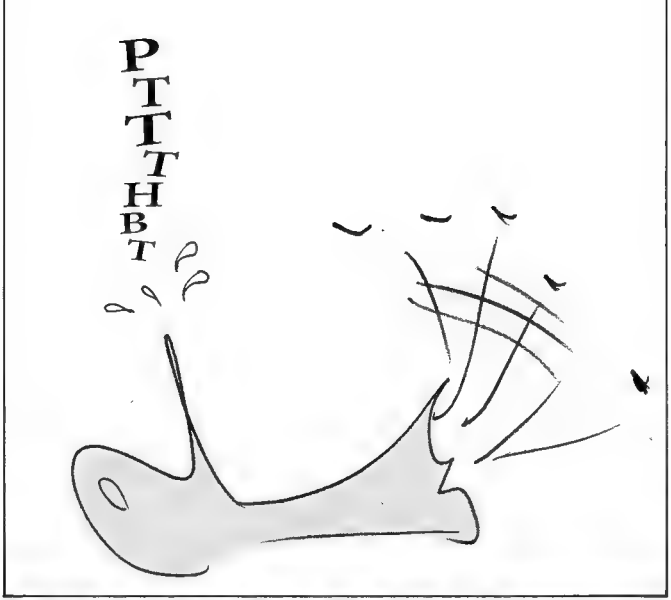
I believe
"I wonder if, unbeknownst to me, Aiko has become a completely different Aiko who I don't know at all.

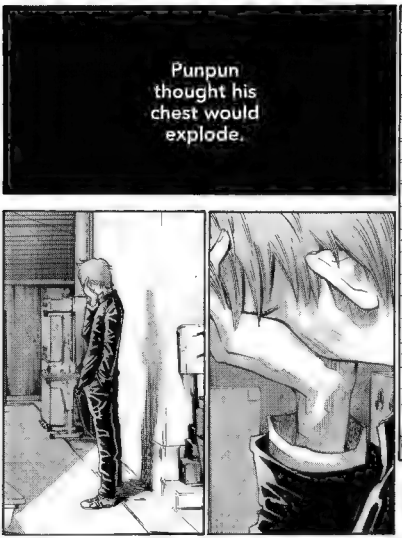

No matter how much thought he put into it, the answer just wouldn't come to him.
And he couldn't understand Yaguchi, his mom or Komatsu at all.

But... but what if...


Maybe Aiko doesn't like me anymore?


That thought made Punpun...
Punpun!


PTTTHBT

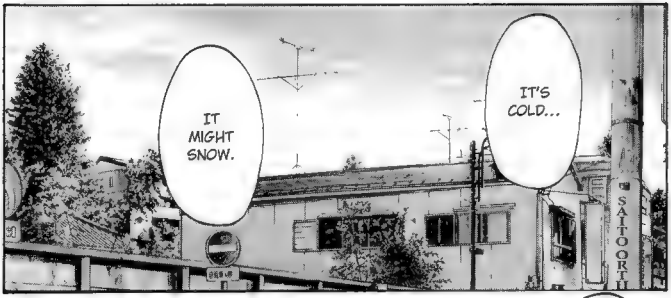

Punpun thought his chest would explode.
PTTTHBT!!

HONDA.
IWA-MOTO.
YAGUCHI.
KO-MATSU.
YOU GUYS ARE THE SINGLES TEAM!
UMM...THE NORTHERN PREFECTURE TOURNAMENT IS NEXT WEEK...
THOSE OF YOU WHO WEREN'T SELECTED, CHEER YOUR TEAMMATES ON!
HEY, YOU FIRST-YEAR OVER THERE, PAY ATTENTION.
HEEEY!
...so he decided to fill his head with choco pies and space instead.
Punpun felt like his brain might explode if he thought any more...

LET'S WALK TOGETHER!
ONODERA!

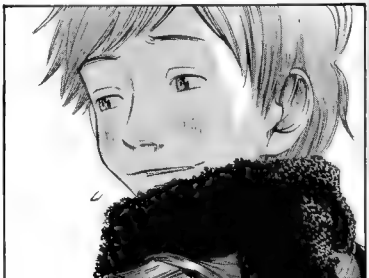
AT THE CLINIC YESTERDAY ...
...THEY TOLD ME MY FOOT'S PRETTY BAD, AND THE DOCTOR SAID NO MORE SPORTS.

THE TOURNAMENT'S NEXT WEEK...


IT'S COLD...
IT MIGHT SNOW.
SAITOORII

NUH
UH

DO YOU WANT SOMETHING TO DRINK?

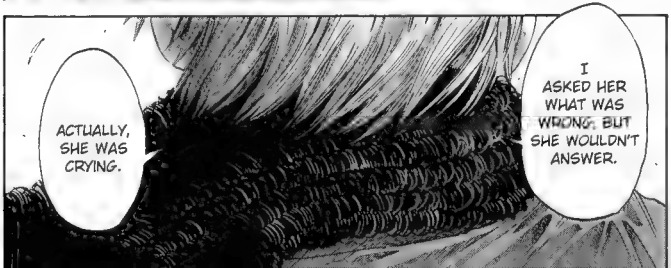


YOU KNOW ...
...THAT GIRL I TOLD YOU ABOUT YESTERDAY?
I DON'T KNOW...
WE HELD HANDS ONCE, BUT SHE HASN'T LET ME TOUCH HER SINCE.
KAIRUI OOSHI-AITO

Punpun had no way of knowing what Aiko was thinking.

OH YEAH...
...I TOLD HER ABOUT YOU AT LUNCH TODAY.
YOU KNOW, LIKE "THERE'S A NICE KID ON MY TEAM" KIND OF THING.

AND THEN...
...HER FACE JUST...


I ASKED HER WHAT WAS WRONG, BUT SHE WOULDN'T ANSWER.
ACTUALLY, SHE WAS CRYING.

SO DID YOU...
...AND AIKO USED TO HAVE SOMETHING GOING ON?

MAYBE YOU'RE THE ONE...
...SHE REALLY LOVES, ONODERA?
SAY SOME-THING ...
...OR I'LL DO SOMETHING REALLY EMBAR-RASSING...

YOU KNOW, AIKO GOES STRAIGHT HOME AFTER SCHOOL...
I HEARD SHE TAKES CARE OF HER SICK DAD.
SO I THOUGHT ABOUT IT REALLY HARD...
...AND FIGURED I SHOULD GET A JOB AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SO I CAN MAKE THINGS EASIER ON HER.
I'D EASILY GIVE UP BADMINTON FOR THAT!

"That hasn't changed."

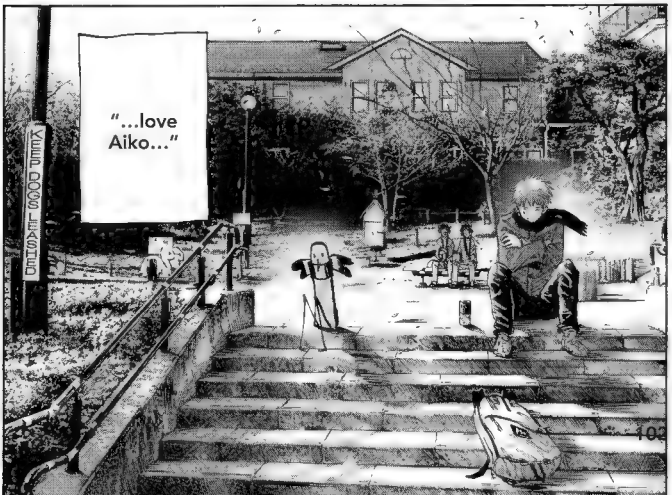
"Aiko does always look a little sad.

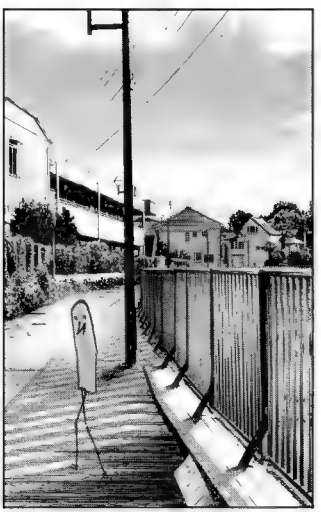
...Punpun thought.

"That's right..."

Shoot him.

"I...


"...love Aiko..."
KISS OF DEATH



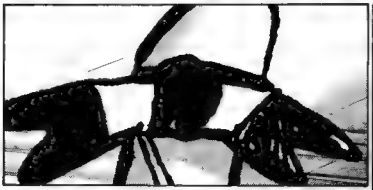
"I love Aiko..."
"I don't know how Aiko feels, but I love her," Punpun said in almost a whisper.
...I'M NOT ASKING YOU HOW YOU FEEL...
ONODERA..

AAARGH!
AHH! AHH!
AHHHHH!
WHAT IS THIS...? WHAT'S GOING ON...?
I'M FEELING REALLY FUZZY...
HOW DO I EXPLAIN IT...?
IT FEELS LIKE THERE'S ONLY HALF OF ME...
I SHOULD'VE JUST STUCK TO BADMINTON...
...AND NOT GONE OUT WITH HER.

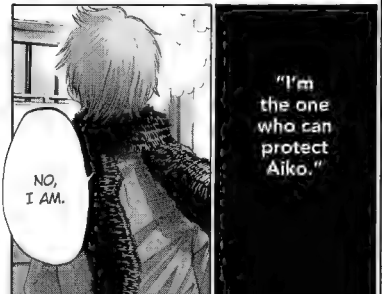
I CAN'T DO IT... I CAN'T CHOOSE BETWEEN THEM...
IF I CAN'T HAVE BOTH, THEN I DON'T WANT *EITHER*.
WHAT IS THIS...?
SHIT...

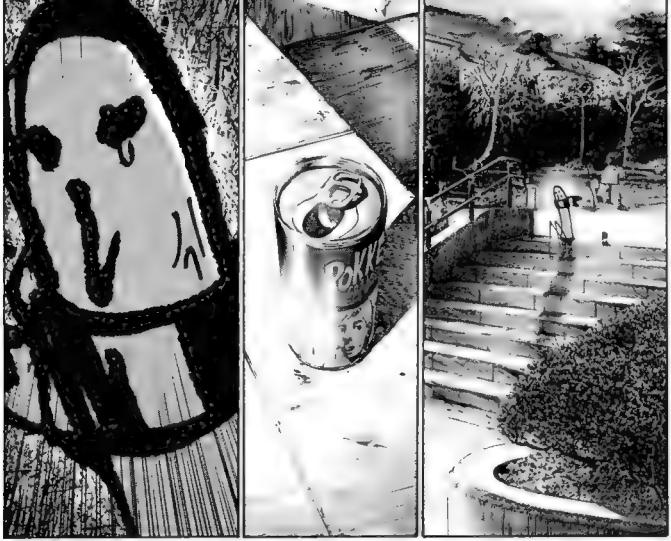
ONODERA!
IF I DON'T WIN THE TOURNAMENT NEXT WEEK, I'LL FORGET ALL ABOUT AIKO!
AND *YOU* HAVE TO TELL HER HOW YOU FEEL.
BUT...

...THEN AIKO IS MINE FOR LIFE!
...IF I WIN...



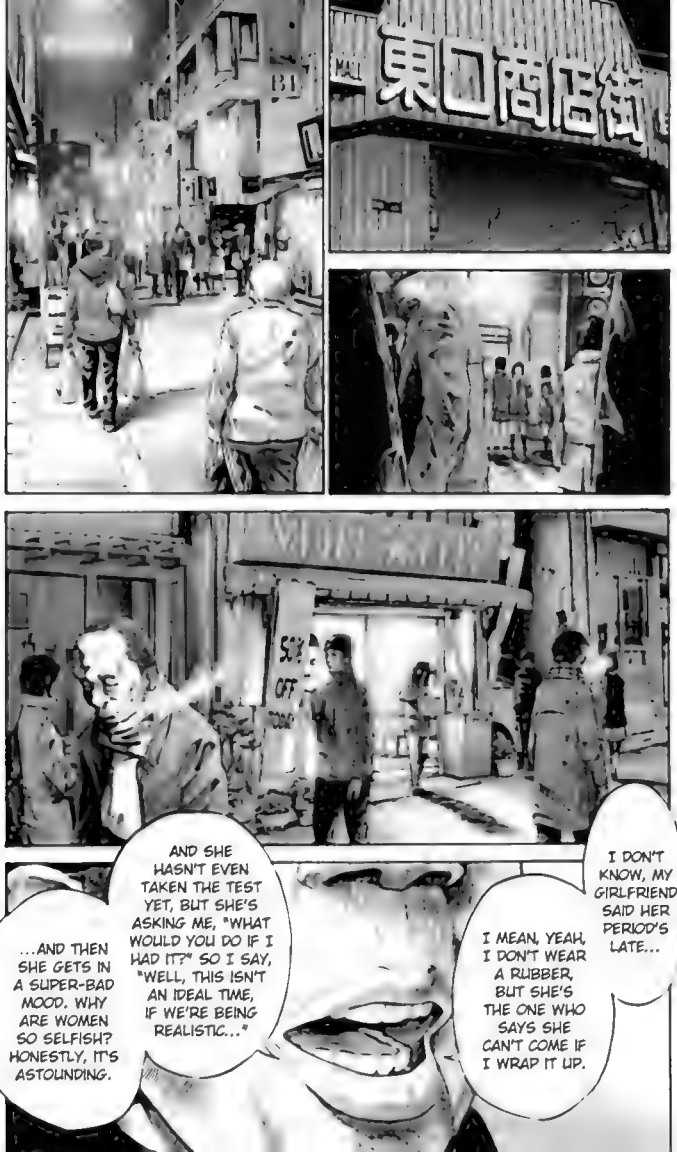
LATER.


"I'm the one who can protect Aiko."
NO, I AM.


POKKE

KA
WO
NK
KUMA DOOSHIKOU

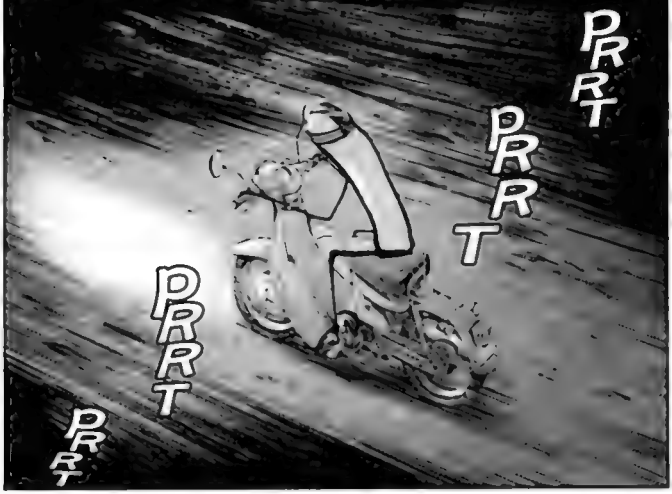
GOODNIGHT PUNPUN
Part Three
INIO ASANO


東口商店街
I DON'T KNOW, MY GIRLFRIEND SAID HER PERIOD'S LATE...
I MEAN, YEAH, I DON'T WEAR A RUBBER, BUT SHE'S THE ONE WHO SAYS SHE CAN'T COME IF I WRAP IT UP.
AND SHE HASN'T EVEN TAKEN THE TEST YET, BUT SHE'S ASKING ME, "WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF I HAD IT?" SO I SAY, "WELL, THIS ISN'T AN IDEAL TIME, IF WE'RE BEING REALISTIC..."
...AND THEN SHE GETS IN A SUPER-BAD MOOD. WHY ARE WOMEN SO SELFISH? HONESTLY, IT'S ASTOUNDING.

SO THAT'S THE WHOLE FANTASY SCENARIO I CAME UP WITH IN BED YESTERDAY.
HOW DO I FIND A GIRLFRIEND?
YOU'RE PLENTY DETER-MINED.
WELL, LOVE IS LIKE A DRUG TO COUNTERACT THE TERROR OF SOLITUDE...
...BUT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO EXPERIENCE THE FURTHER TERROR OF WITHDRAWAL, BEING ALONE IS DEFINITELY NOT A MISTAKE.
YUICHI...
...HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?
THIRTY-THREE.
YUICHI, DO YOU THINK BEING ALIVE IS FUN?

WELL... WHAT CAN I SAY...?
IT'S NOT ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT IT'S FUN ANYMORE...
WOW...
...THAT'S REALLY COOL.
THEN WHAT IS IT ABOUT, YUICHI?
ATONEMENT, MAYBE.
WHOA ...
...I'M GOING TO USE THAT THE NEXT TIME I GO ON A DATE.
GO FOR IT.

VIDEO★HE
PUT PUT PUT PUT PUT
...YOU SHOULD BE OUT LIVING IT INSTEAD!
AS YOU GET OLDER YOU'LL FIGURE IT OUT ANYWAY ...
VRRRRM
WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG...
...IF YOU HAVE THE TIME TO PONDER THE MEANING OF LIFE...
ANDONED BIKE
THE HELL WITH LOVE!
PRRRRRT
PRRRT
PRRRT
PRRRT

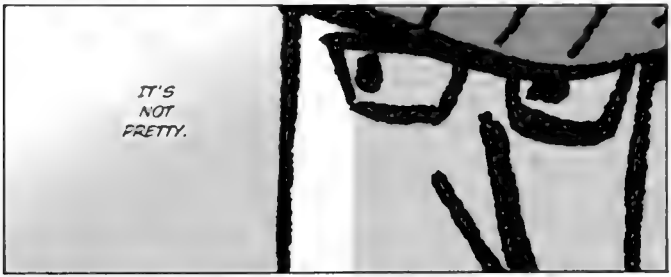

DRRT
DRRT
DRRT
DRRT

OH?
YUGAMI, YOU'RE LEAVING?
HOW ABOUT A CUP OF COFFEE?
REALLY ...?
OKAY, I'LL CALL YOU.

UM... CINNAMON FRENCH TOAST...
...AND THE KILIMANJARO BLEND.
I'M REALLY SORRY!
UM...
...ABOUT THE OTHER DAY, UM...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I DIDN'T GET BURNED OR ANYTHING ...
MY PAPERBACK DIED THOUGH. HA HA HA!

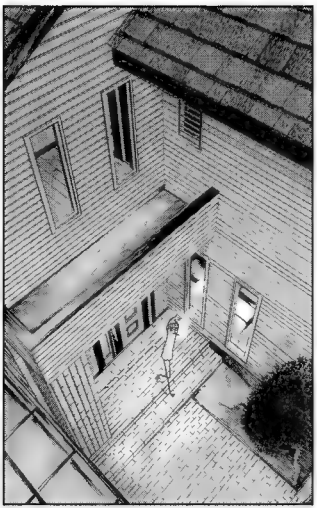
I-I'M SO SORRY. I HAVE ACCIDENTS LIKE THAT A LOT...
I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D COME BACK...
WELL, ACTUALLY, I WAS THINKING ABOUT IT AFTERWARD, AND...
...DIDN'T YOU USE TO WORK AT THE MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL?
MY SISTER WAS THERE ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO.
OH!
WAIT, ARE YOU MR. PUNYAMA?
THAT'S RIGHT. THAT LITTLE DRACAENA YOU GAVE US WHEN SHE WAS DISCHARGED IS STILL IN OUR LIVING ROOM...
AND, WELL, IT'S A LITTLE COMPLICATED, BUT WE GO BY ONODERA NOW.
WOOOW!
WHAT AN AMAZING COINCIDENCE!
JUST AMAZING... HA HA HA...

I CAN'T FORGIVE MYSELF FOR CONSIDERING BEING CONTENT WITH SUCH A COINCIDENCE...
IF YOU CALL AN UNEXPECTED MIRACLE A COINCIDENCE...

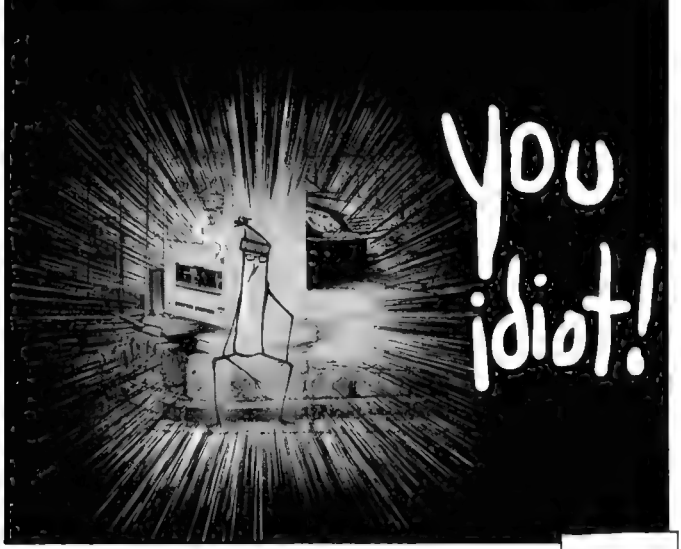

IT'S NOT PRETTY.

...IS NOTHING BUT A SHAME.
A LOVE WHERE YOU JUST LICK EACH OTHER'S WOUNDS...

HERE YOU ARE!
HEY, YOU REALLY ARE CLUMSY ...
I DIDN'T ORDER AN ICED COFFEE.
IT'S THE MIDDLE OF WINTER!
IT'S ON THE HOUSE!
Would you like to go to dinner tomorrow?

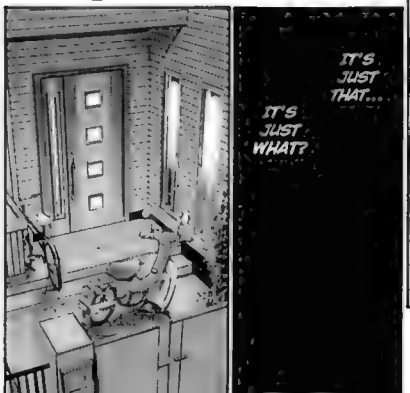


THANKS SO MUCH FOR ASKING ME OUT, BUT I WORK TOMORROW NIGHT.
OH...
... OKAY ...
WELL, I GUESS I COULD GET IT OFF.

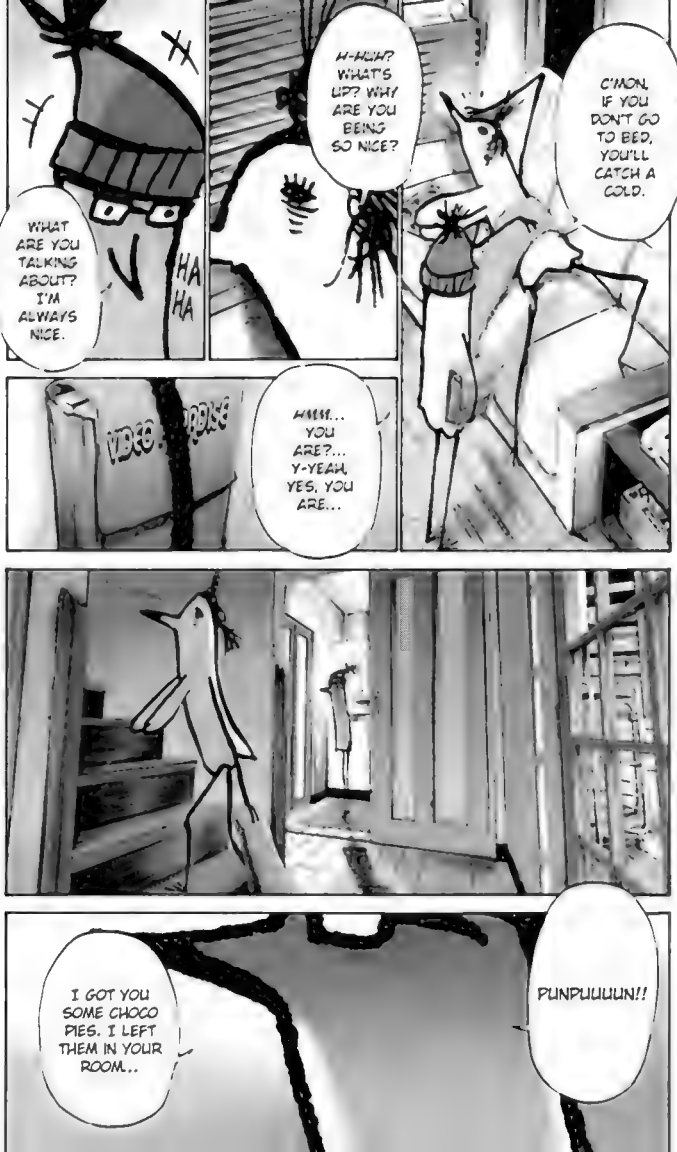

You idiot!

NO, NO, I'M NOT EXPECTING ANYTHING...

IT WAS JUST A YOUNG WOMAN'S WHIM.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, FALLING FOR THAT AT YOUR AGE?


IT'S JUST WHAT?
IT'S JUST THAT...

I'M HOME.
HONK
SHU
TSK
ARMPIT HAIR...
DIE!


C'MON, IF YOU DON'T GO TO BED, YOU'LL CATCH A COLD.
H-HUH? WHAT'S UP? WHY ARE YOU BEING SO NICE?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I'M ALWAYS NICE.
HA HA
HUHH... YOU ARE?... Y-YEAH, YES, YOU ARE...
PUNPUUUUN!!
I GOT YOU SOME CHOCO PIES. I LEFT THEM IN YOUR ROOM...

CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
CURSES
YOU HAVE PRACTICE AGAIN TOMORROW MORNING, RIGHT?
YOU SHOULD HURRY UP IN THERE AND GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP. HA HA HA!

SHLK
SHLK
SHLK
SHLK

THE PROBLEM ISN'T WHETHER IT'S JUST A WHIM OR WHETHER SHE'S TEASING ME.
I'M THE ONE WHO DECIDED TO BE SINGLE.

SHLK
SHLK
SHLK
SHLK
SHAVED NURSES
SHLK
SHLK

SHLK
SHLSHLK
WHO AM I KIDDING...?
I'M JUST A HYPOCRITE!

A GUY LIKE ME...
...ISN'T MADE FOR FALLING IN LOVE.

OH, I'M REALLY SORRY!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT—I'M THE ONE WHO ASKED YOU OUT, AND THEN I'M LATE!
UM, IT'S A TOTAL CLICHÉ, BUT I WAS WORRIED I LEFT THE GAS GOING ON THE STOVE...

NO, NO, NO, REALLY DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
SO ANYWAY, I TRIED TO RUSH BACK, BUT THE CHAIN FELL OFF MY BIKE...
AND ACTUALLY MY MOM IS OFF WORK TODAY, SO SHE WAS HOME...
BUT WE SWITCHED TO AN ELECTRIC ONE LAST MONTH, SO IF I'D JUST THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR A SECOND...
Pizzeria
HMMM ...
...YOUR RESERVATION IS AT SIX TOMORROW EVENING, MS. OKUMA...
I GOT US A RESERVATION AT A REALLY NICE PLACE FOR DINNER!
B-BUT...

UM...I REALLY AM VERY SORRY!
...I'M REALLY SORRY. THIS ISN'T WHAT I HAD PLANNED AT ALL...
URR...
THIS WAS QUITE THE CHAIN OF EVENTS. I'M IMPRESSED.
KARAOKE
I DON'T MIND IF WE JUST HANG OUT AND DO KARAOKE.

UMMM, TWO PINTS...
...OKRA AND TOFU SALAD, FRIED CHICKEN CARTILAGE...
UM, AND ONE TOM YUM TOFU...
OH WAIT, THAT'S TOO MUCH TOFU... SO LET'S GO WITH TOM YUM KUN. YES, KUN!
menu

PHEW...
TONIGHT HAS BEEN CHAOTIC FROM THE GET-GO.
YES, CUNNI—
OH, BEFORE I FORGET, HERE...
I'M SORRY I GOT IT WET.
THE NECKTIE
YES, THAT'S ALL!
THANK YOU FOR WAITING!
OH...
...I GET IT.
I WAS WONDERING WHY YOU'D ASK AN OLD MAN OUT FOR DINNER, BUT IT WAS TO RETURN THIS...
NO, THAT ISN'T WHY...
WELL, OF COURSE THAT'S PART OF IT, BUT...
YOU'RE VERY CONSCI-ENTIOUS.

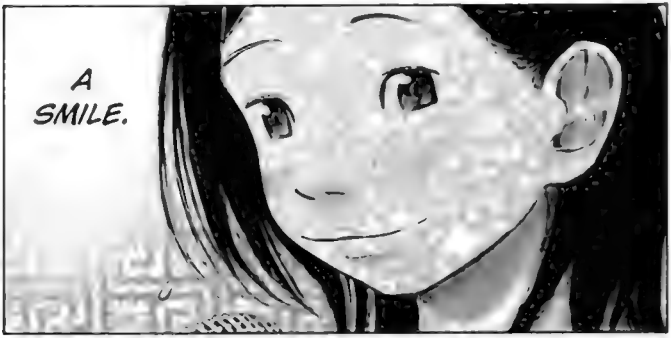
MIDORI OKUMA, 25 YEARS OLD. A LOCAL BORN AND BRED, SHE CURRENTLY LIVES WITH HER PARENTS.

SHE WAS THE ONE WHO GAVE US THE TREE OF HAPPINESS.
I REMEMBER HER WELL, SINCE SHE WAS MY SISTER'S NURSE.
SHE WORKED AT THE MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL AFTER GRADUATING FROM NURSING SCHOOL.
90'S HITS

SHE'S BASICALLY A KIND AND HELPFUL PERSON.
...BUT AS I RECALL, MY SISTER REALLY TOOK TO HER.
SHE'S A LITTLE CLUMSY...

...BUT SHE'S A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT HER UNCERTAIN FUTURE.
HER HIGH SCHOOL DREAM WAS TO OWN A COFFEE SHOP, AND SO SHE STARTED WORKING PART-TIME AT THE CAFE...
SHE QUIT LAST YEAR BECAUSE, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE WORKING CONDITIONS WERE ROUGH.

SHE'S SWEET. SHE'S A GOOD PERSON.
FOR SOMEONE IN HER TWENTIES, SHE'S VERY...


A SMILE.

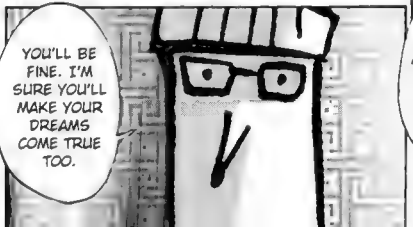
WHAT ARE YOU AFTER?!

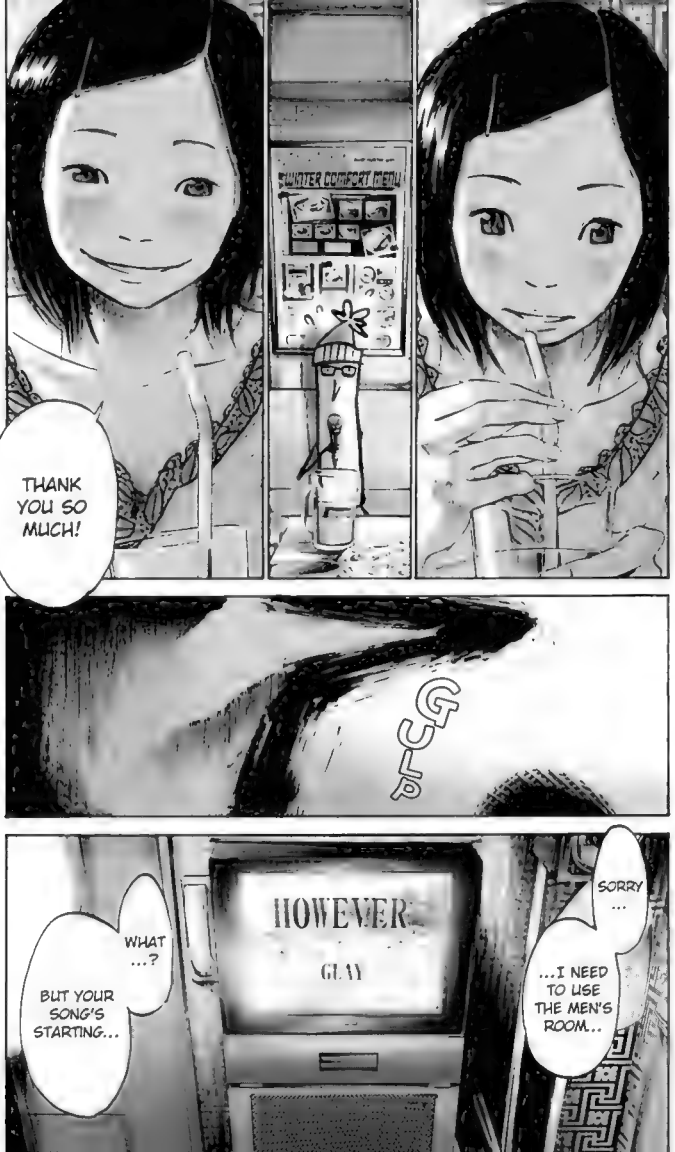
BIPPPP
OH, SORRY ABOUT THAT.
I'M THE ONLY ONE SINGING. DON'T YOU LIKE KARAOKE, YUICHI?
UMM ...

682 78 RESERVED

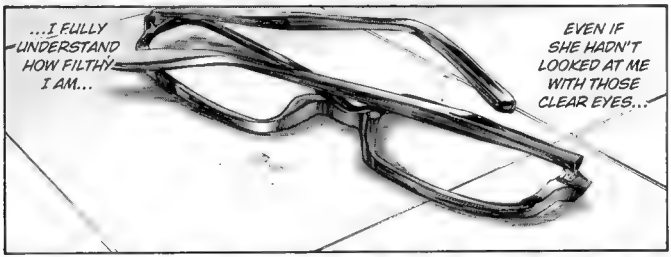
THAT'S AMAZING... I NEED TO BECOME A REAL ADULT...
WELL, AFTER LIVING WITH THEM FOR TWO YEARS, I'VE GROWN TO LOVE THEM LIKE FAMILY.

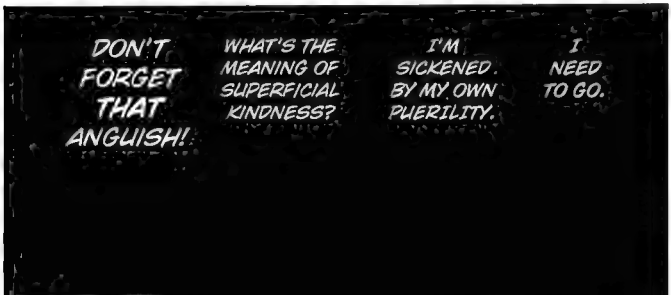
YOU'RE REALLY SWEET, YUICHI.
LOOKING AFTER YOUR SISTER AND NEPHEW LIKE THAT.

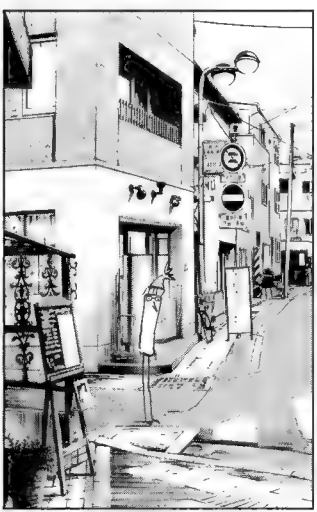

YOU'LL BE FINE. I'M SURE YOU'LL MAKE YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE TOO.


WINTER COMFORT MENU
THANK YOU SO MUCH!
GULP
SORRY...
...I NEED TO USE THE MEN'S ROOM...
HOWEVER
GLAY
WHAT...?
BUT YOUR SONG'S STARTING...

WINTER COMFORT MENU
PART TIME
DON'T LOOK AT ME...
...LIKE THAT...

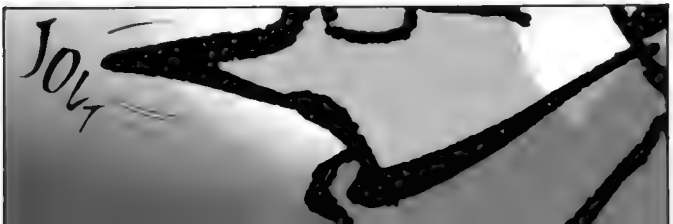

...I FULLY UNDERSTAND HOW FILTHY I AM...
EVEN IF SHE HADN'T LOOKED AT ME WITH THOSE CLEAR EYES...


DON'T FORGET THAT ANGUISH!
WHAT'S THE MEANING OF SUPERFICIAL KINDNESS?
I'M SICKENED BY MY OWN PUERILITY.
I NEED TO GO.



DASH
YUICHI..
HEY, YUICHI, WAIT UP!
DASH

WHY ARE YOU LEAVING SO SUDDENLY?!
DID I SAY SOMETHING TO OFFEND YOU?!


JOLT

THE POOP!
IT WON'T STOP, SO I'M GOING HOME!!
WHAT ...?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
ANYWAY ...
...MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M NOT USED TO THIS, BUT I'M EXHAUSTED...
...SO I'M GOING HOME NOW.
OH...
...I UNDERSTAND...

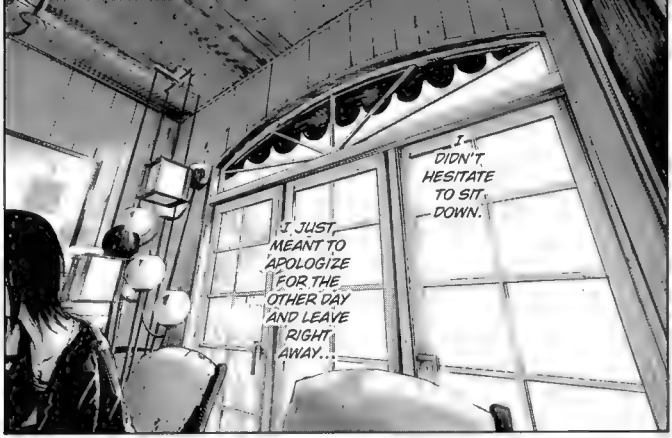
UM...
PLEASE COME TO THE CAFÉ AGAIN.
THANK YOU FOR THE BOOK.
I'LL BE WAITING!

NOW THE WEEKEND FORECAST FOR THE KANTO REGION.
AN EXTREME COLD FRONT IS COMING IN FROM THE SEA OF JAPAN, AND SNOW IS PREDICTED IN THE INLAND AREAS
CURSES
HAVE A GREAT WEEKEND, EVERYONE!
HEEEY! YUICHI!
IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING TO SNOW TOMORROW! WILL YOU GO DO THE SHOPPING?

SO I BASIC-ALLY HAVEN'T BEEN...
...ABLE TO DO ANYTHING THE LAST COUPLE OF DAYS...
SNOW...
IF IT'S GOING TO SNOW, IT MIGHT AS WELL GO ALL OUT...
...AND SMOTHER EVERYTHING IN WHITE.

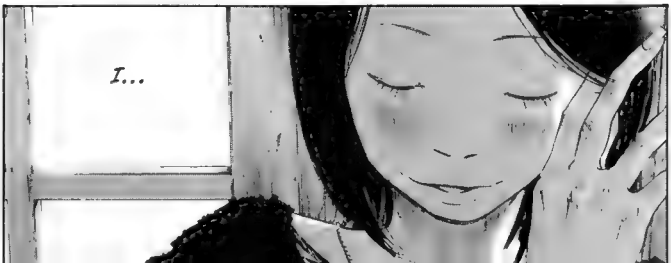
BOOKS IWAMA
イワマ書店
NEW RELEASES
CAFE
OH, YUGAMI, WHAT A COINCI-DENCE.
DRRT DRRT DRRT
HOW ABOUT IT? DO YOU HAVE TIME FOR A CUP OF COFFEE?
NUP NUP

AGAIN? YOU'RE A STRANGE ONE.
IT'S NOT GOOD FOR YOU TO WORK TOO HARD.
JI N'GL E
SORRY! WE'RE CLOSED...
OH...
OHH... SORRY ABOUT THAT...
I'LL COME BACK ANOTHER TIME.
...YUICHI...
OHHH, NOT AT ALL! IT'S TOTALLY FINE!
PLEASE— PLEASE MAKE YOUR-SELF AT HOME...
MY MANAGER HAD AN EMERGENCY AND HAD TO LEAVE, SO I'M CLOSING UP.
SHOP


I DIDN'T HESITATE TO SIT DOWN.
I JUST MEANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR THE OTHER DAY AND LEAVE RIGHT AWAY...

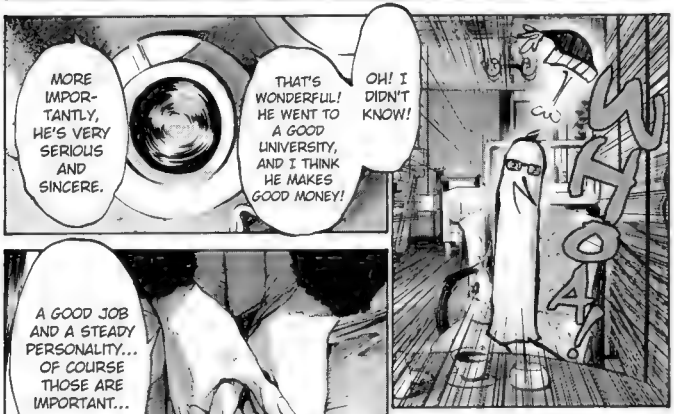
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I'VE SPENT SUCH PEACEFUL TIME WITH A WOMAN?
...BUT BEFORE I REALIZED IT, DUSK HAD FALLEN.

LISTENING TO HER TALK PASSIONATELY ABOUT HER DREAMS...
"I WANT TO OPEN A COZY LITTLE CAFÉ."


I...

I CAN'T DENY THAT I HAVE FEELINGS FOR THIS GIRL...!
HUH?! WELL, YEAH...
THERE'S NO DENYING IT'LL BE HARD TO SAVE UP ENOUGH MONEY TO OPEN A CAFÉ WITH JUST A PART-TIME JOB...
HA HA HA
...BUT I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE A SPECIFIC VISION.
BUT ANYWAY ...
...I CAN'T KEEP HOLDING ON TO A PIPE DREAM.
MY PARENTS HAVE STARTED TREATING ME A LITTLE COLDLY LATELY ...
I DON'T HAVE A STEADY JOB, NO BOYFRIEND ...
I KNOW I NEED TO GET OUT OF THIS SITUATION AS SOON AS I CAN...

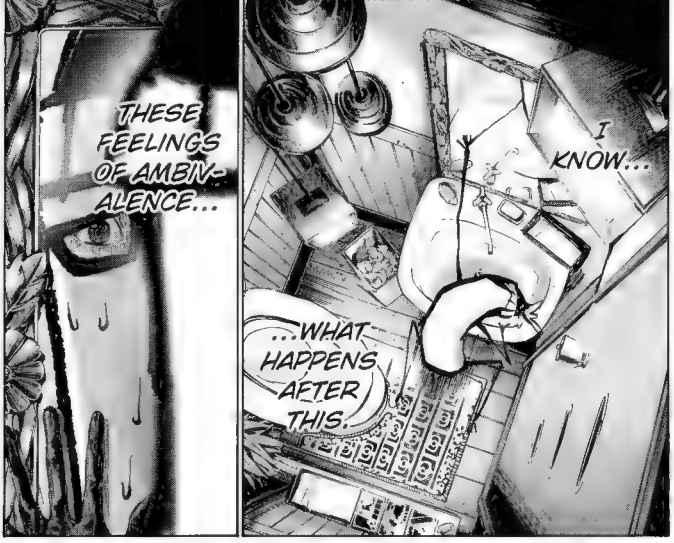
AND ACTUALLY, UM...
...I'M NOT SURE HOW TO SAY THIS, BUT...
...YUGAMI HAS BEEN HITTING ON ME, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...

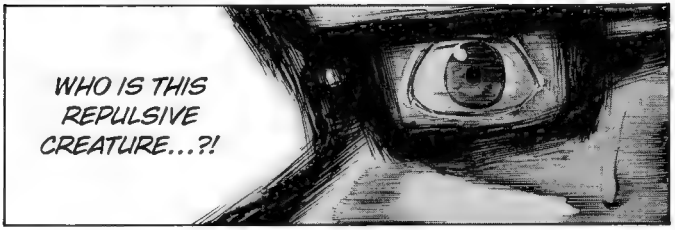

OH! I DIDN'T KNOW!
THAT'S WONDERFUL! HE WENT TO A GOOD UNIVERSITY, AND I THINK HE MAKES GOOD MONEY!
MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE'S VERY SERIOUS AND SINCERE.
AHOA!

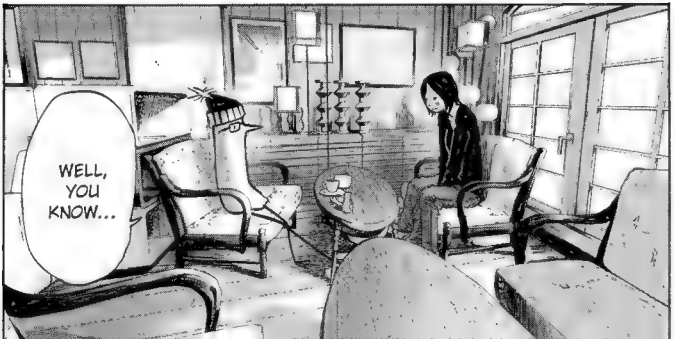
A GOOD JOB AND A STEADY PERSONALITY... OF COURSE THOSE ARE IMPORTANT...

ACTUALLY, I'M VERY SHY.
ESPE-CIALLY AROUND MEN...
THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER ASKED SOMEONE I BARELY KNOW TO DINNER!
BUT I HAVE THE FEELING THAT "THE ONE" IS OUT THERE SOMEWHERE, AND MY CERTAINTY IS BASED ON GUT FEELING, NOT LOGIC...

I NEED TO PEE!
UM, I...
WAIT JUST A MINUTE!
THUD
SHUP
CAFE


THESE FEELINGS OF AMBIV-ALENCE...
I KNOW...
...WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THIS.


WHO IS THIS REPULSIVE CREATURE...?!


WELL, YOU KNOW...

I...
I'M UTTERLY DESPICABLE— YOU CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE.

W-WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THAT'S ...
...SO RANDOM ...
YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR SISTER...
I THINK YOU'RE A GOOD PERSON, YUICHI.

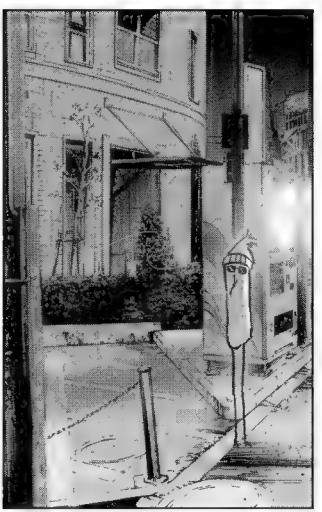
ACTUALLY, I DON'T FEEL ANY EMOTIONAL BOND TO MY SISTER'S FAMILY.
ALL I WANTED WAS TO EXIST WITHOUT HAVING ANYTHING TO DO WITH ANYONE ELSE.
CAN YOU CALL SOMEONE WHO'S THAT SELFISH A GOOD PERSON...?
AS SOMEONE WHO FELL THROUGH SOCIETY'S CRACKS AND WAS LIVING LIKE GARBAGE, THAT HOUSE WAS JUST A CONVENIENT BOX FOR ME TO STAY IN.
BUT...!
YOU BOUGHT THIS BOOK FOR ME, RIGHT?!
CAFE

THE NIGHT BEFORE I WENT TO KARAOKE WITH YOU...
...I MASTURBATED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS.

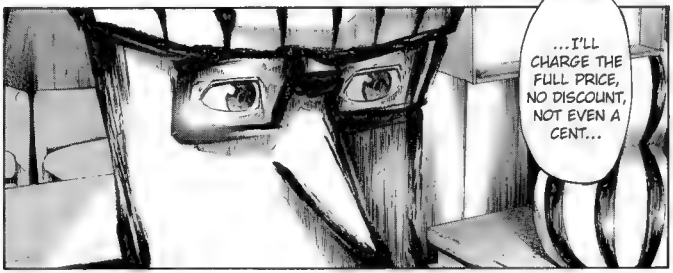
W-WHY...
WHY WOULD YOU TELL ME THAT?!
ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE ME HATE YOU, YUICHI?!

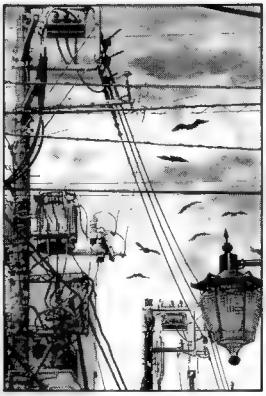
YOU KNOW, YUICHI...
WHENEVER I TRY TO GET CLOSER TO YOU, YOU MOVE FURTHER AWAY...
ISN'T THAT SNEAKY?
YOU'RE A SNEAKY PERSON, YUICHI...
YOU'RE A LOT YOUNGER THAN I AM.
I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOUR FUTURE...
I'M...
...I'M ALREADY HURT RIGHT NOW...

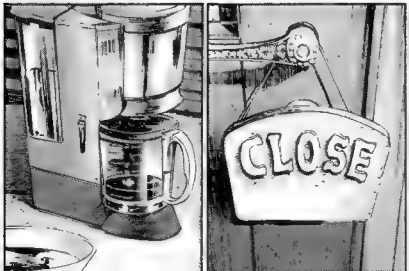
YUICHI...
...WHAT IS IT? DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TO YOU...?
SORRY...
...UMM, HOW MUCH IS THE COFFEE?
I SHOULD BE GOING...
A THOUSAND DOLLARS.
IF YOU DON'T TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU...
...I'LL CHARGE THE FULL PRICE, NO DISCOUNT, NOT EVEN A CENT...

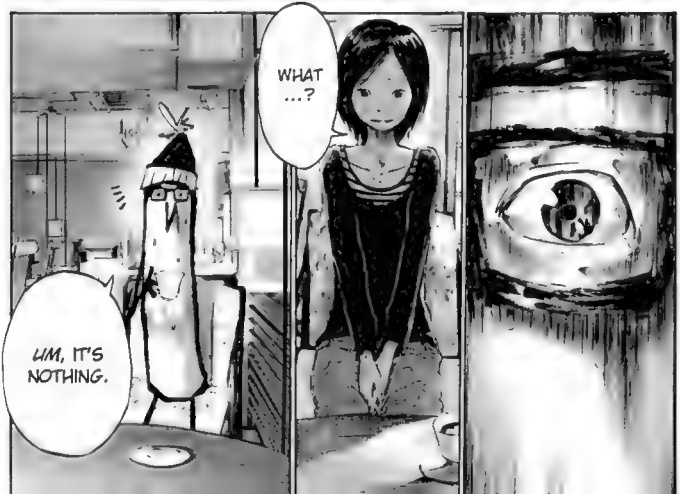


IF YOU DON'T TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU...


...I'LL CHARGE THE FULL PRICE, NO DISCOUNT, NOT EVEN A CENT...

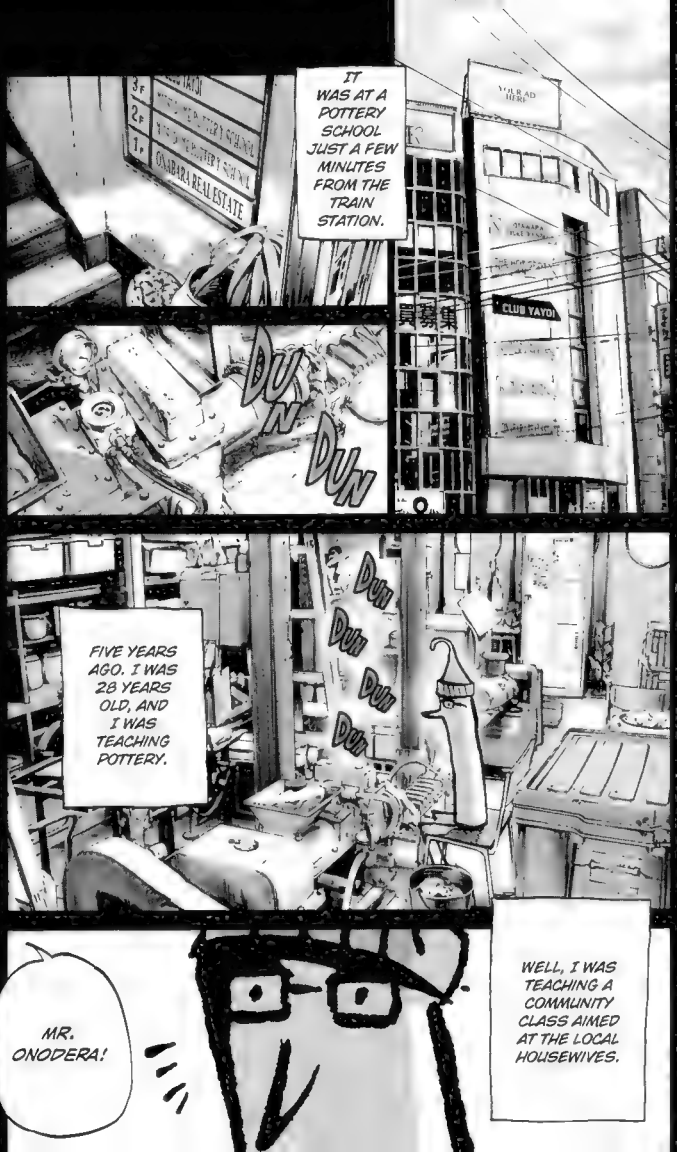



CLOSE


WHAT ...?
UM, IT'S NOTHING.

THERE'S NO HURRY...
TAK
JUST... TAKE YOUR TIME.
KLOOB KLOOB
YOU'RE THE FIRST PERSON I'VE EVER TOLD THIS TO...

OH MAN, IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS ALREADY...
IT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO...
I WAS LIVING ON MY OWN IN AN APARTMENT NOT FAR FROM MY PARENTS'.
大船駅
OFUNA STATION
(東口)
I HAD A MASTER'S DEGREE IN ART.
...BUT I STILL COULDN'T FIGURE OUT MY PLACE IN LIFE, AND I WAS FEELING PRETTY ISOLATED...
...SO ONE OF MY PROFESSORS FOUND ME A JOB.


IT WAS AT A POTTERY SCHOOL JUST A FEW MINUTES FROM THE TRAIN STATION.
ONODERA REAL ESTATE
CLUB YAYOI
DUN DUN
FIVE YEARS AGO. I WAS 28 YEARS OLD, AND I WAS TEACHING POTTERY.
Dun Dun Dun Dun
WELL, I WAS TEACHING A COMMUNITY CLASS AIMED AT THE LOCAL HOUSEWIVES.
MR. ONODERA!

THANK YOU FOR TODAY!
I'LL SEE YOU NEXT WEEK.
GOOD JOB, LADIES. I'LL SEE YOU NEXT WEEK.
I WAS VERY POPULAR BACK THEN.
6
UM...MR. ONODERA.
OH... THANK YOU, BUT NO...
WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO ACCEPT GIFTS FROM STUDENTS.
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME CREAM PUFFS? I WAITED IN LINE FOREVER TO GET THEM!
ESPECIALLY WITH MRS. YAGI, WHOSE INTEREST IN ME WAS STRANGELY INTENSE.

I PAY TUITION JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE— DON'T YOU THINK IT'S UNFAIR?!
A SCHOOL THAT RUNS ON CITY FUNDS LIKE YOURS, ONE LITTLE COMPLAINT TO CITY HALL AND I COULD GET YOU CLOSED DOWN...
WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS?!
MR. ONODERA IS SO RUDE!
HE'S SO NICE TO MRS. KOJIMA, MRS. OIKE AND MRS. SUGAWARA, BUT HE'S SO COLD TO ME!
Panasonic
I'M SORRY.
YES, YES, HA HA, YES, THANK YOU. WE'LL SEE YOU NEXT WEEK...
YES, MRS. YAGI, I AM SO SORRY. I'LL HAVE A TALK WITH HIM.
SHE MIGHT BE A STUDENT, BUT SHE'S ALSO ONLY A CUSTOMER, SO JUST PLAY ALONG.
YUICHI, I KNOW YOU'RE VERY CONSCIENTIOUS, BUT NO NEED TO TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY.
NAAAH, WE GET PEOPLE LIKE THIS EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.

HOW NICE.
YOU'RE SO POPULAR.
HEEEY!
STOP THAT, WASHIO!
I'M TEN TIMES MORE ENVIOUS OF YOU.
A YOUNG TALENT LIKE YOU, IT'S A SHAME YOU'RE IN A SCHOOL LIKE THIS...
I'M SURE IN TIME YOUR PIECE WILL GET THE RECOGNI-TION IT DESERVES.
YEAH! YOUR PIECE, THAT CELADON POT, I HEAR IT'S GOING TO BE IN A MAGAZINE.
THAT THING...

THAT'S JUST A THING.
BESIDES, MAN DECIDES THE CRITERIA FOR BEAUTY AFTER THE FACT.
SO I THINK ETERNAL BEAUTY LIES IN SOME-THING EVER CHANGING...
LIKE LIFE, FOR INSTANCE.
DON'T YOU THINK THAT POT WAS AT ITS MOST BEAUTI-FUL...
...WHEN IT WAS FIRING IN THE KILN?
I THINK IT'S PLENTY IMPRES-SIVE.
...THE DELICATE CURVES...
THE FULL, ABUNDANT SHAPE...

I WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING LIKE THAT SOMEDAY TOO!
YUUUI!
YUI, ARE YOU IN THERE?!
YOU'RE WORKING ON ANOTHER MODEL?
KACHAK
OH, YOU'RE HOME.
YOU COULD'VE UNLOCKED THE DOOR FOR ME.
I'M MISSING A PIECE.

I WAS DATING A WOMAN I KNEW FROM UNIVERSITY. SHE LIVED WITH HER PARENTS AND WORKED IN AN OFFICE.
SHE LOVED TO DRINK AND INSULT PEOPLE.
THAT SAID, SHE WAS FOR THE MOST PART A GENTLE, KIND WOMAN.
I'M GOING NOW...
WILL YOU KEEP SATURDAY NIGHT FREE? I MADE PLANS.
OH, YOU FORGOT THIS...
GOOD-NIGHT.

ND THE RIGHT VENUE FOR YOUR WEDD
THAT WAS MY LIFE BACK THEN.
USUAL DAYS PASSING IN THE USUAL WAY...
... INEVITABLY LEADING TO THE USUAL FUTURE.

FEELING LIKE A JIGSAW PUZZLE WITH A MISSING PIECE...
...BUT STILL BUYING INTO THE CONCEIT THAT BEING HUMAN MEANT BECOMING AN ADULT.
SURROUNDED BY ALL KINDS OF OTHER PEOPLE
BUT I'D KEEP MY COOL COMPOSURE.
...OR SO I THOUGHT.
BUT..
...BUT WHAT IF...
Dreams For Sale Cheap!! $1.00 —Tatsu.

NO !!
I AM ME!
WHAT IF I'M...
...ALREADY BROKEN?
...IN THIS ABNORMAL DAILY LIFE...

OH!
MR. ONO-DERA!
THIS IS MY DAUGHTER!
IF IT'S OKAY, I WAS HOPING YOU COULD TEACH HER TOO!

HEE HEE...
...MR. ONODERA, PLEASE EXCUSE ME...
CLUB YAYOI
新規会員募集
MRS. OIKE BROUGHT SOME CAKE. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME?
MRS. YAGI!
UM...
...I'M REALLY SORRY ABOUT MY MOM...
SHE DRAGGED ME HERE...
SHE'LL USE WHATEVER EXCUSE SHE CAN FIND TO GET CLOSER TO YOU, MR. ONODERA...

OH...
OHH! I SEE, HA HA HA!
UM... PLEASE DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT..
I'LL LEAVE AS SOON AS SHE'S SATISFIED.
OH... NO, DON'T DO THAT!
WHERE ARE MY MANNERS?! I'LL GET SOME TEA- YOU JUST RELAX.

OH...
...I'M...
I'M READING THAT BOOK TOO...
OH, WOW!
WHAT A COINCI-DENCE!
THIS IS PRETTY MATURE ...
...UM, HOW OLD ARE YOU?
I'M 16.
WE SEEM TO HAVE...
...SIMILAR TASTES.

...FULL, ABUNDANT SHAPE...
THAT...
...DELICATE CURVES.
THOSE...

Chapter 34

THINKING BACK, THAT GIRL WAS THE EXTRAORDINARY THAT SUDDENLY APPEARED IN MY ORDINARY LIFE.

OR MAYBE I WAS PROJECTING THE INEFFABLE SOMETHING I'D BEEN LOOKING FOR ON TO THIS GIRL, WHO WAS MORE THAN TEN YEARS YOUNGER THAN ME.

OH.
BUT TODAY'S A SCHOOL DAY.
UMM... IS IT A HOLIDAY?
I EASILY IMAGINED THE WORDS "BULLYING" AND "OSTRACISM"...
...WELLING IN HER DOWNCAST EYES.

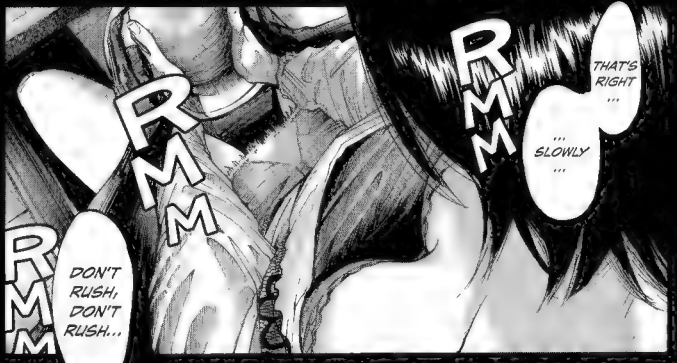
UM... ERRR... I MEAN...
I'M...
I'M USUALLY TIED UP BY MY MOM UNDER HOUSE ARREST...
WOW, 16! THAT'S YOUNG! WHAT DO KIDS DO FOR FUN THESE DAYS?
HA HA HA!
WHAT A WAY WITH WORDS!
HA HA...
SORRY.
OHH...
DO YOU WANT TO TRY THE POTTERY WHEEL?
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
"IF SHE CAN MAKE JOKES ABOUT IT, THEN IT'S PROBABLY NOT SO BAD.

ABOVE ALL...

...CARRIED ON THAT MOIST JUNE AIR...

...HER SCENT...

...HER WARMTH.



...AND PRODUCED IN ME A CHEMICAL REACTION.

THAT PALE SKIN LOOKED LIKE IT WOULD CRUMBLE AT A TOUCH...

STROKE
STROKE
STROKE
STROKE
AND I...
I CONFESS!
I WAS VIOLENTLY...
...ERECT!

YUICHI, TELEPHONE!
WHUMP
WHUMP
WHUMP
OH, IT'S YOU, SIS... I'M AT WORK...
HUH?
PUNPUN DIDN'T COME HOME FROM SCHOOL?!
OKAY! I'LL HEAD OVER RIGHT NOW!
WEEELL...
...I'M REALLY SORRY.
SOME-THING'S COME UP..
...BUT I WANTED TO SHOW YOU HOW TO APPLY GLAZE AND SOME OTHER STUFF...
YOU DON'T NEED TO WAIT TILL YOUR MOM COMES AGAIN...
JUST COME BY WHENEVER YOU WANT!

OH, UH...
ONLY IF YOU WANT...
MR. ONO-DERA...
...DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?
...HUH?

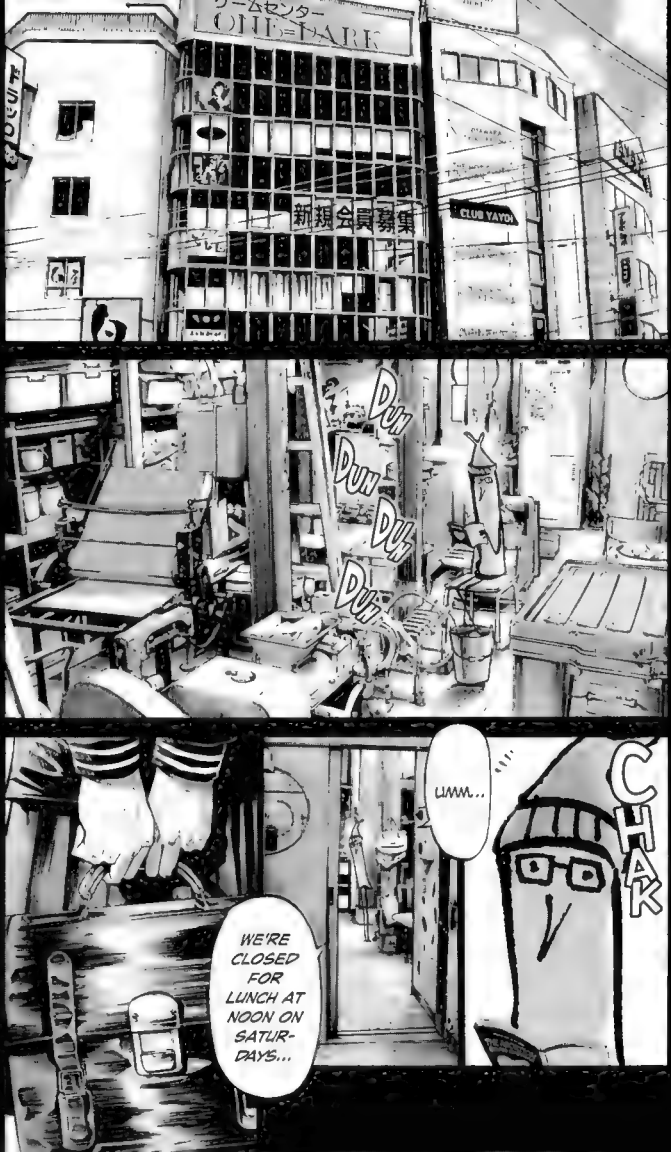
I'VE NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT IT...
NOT REALLY ...
GOD..?
YOU MEAN LIKE JESUS OR BUDDHA?
OR... DO YOU MEAN SOME-THING MORE FIGURATIVE LIKE MONEY OR FREEDOM ...?
I...
...DON'T KNOW ABOUT COMPLICATED THINGS LIKE THAT...

DEAR GOD, DEAR GOD..
... TINKLE ...
... HOY.
TINKLE ?
HUH? WHAT? WHAT WAS THAT?
IT'S A SPELL I'VE USED SINCE I WAS LITTLE...
IT'S FOR WHEN I'M LONELY OR IN PAIN.

I'M DISGUSTED THAT I'VE RELIED ON A GOD THAT ISN'T EVEN REAL.
NO MATTER HOW HARD I PRAY, NOTHING GOOD EVER HAPPENS.
BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN GOD.
...MAYBE HE REALLY DOES EXIST.
BUT NOW I THINK, FOR THE FIRST TIME...
...WILL YOU GO ON A DATE WITH ME?
IF I GO TO SCHOOL ...
W-WELL, JUST COME BACK!
OH, AND GO TO SCHOOL TOO!

"IF THERE IS A GOD, WHY ON EARTH DID HE SEND THIS GIRL INTO MY ORDINARY EXISTENCE?"
THAT'S WHEN I THOUGHT...
YEAH!
I PROMISE!
OH, THANK GOD!
I LOOKED EVERY-WHERE!
YOU KNOW YOU SHOULDN'T COME THIS FAR BY YOURSELF!
YOUR MOM AND DAD ARE DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR YOU RIGHT NOW!
I DIDN'T GET IT.
NO, I WAS JUST PRETENDING NOT TO UNDERSTAND.

HEEY, YUICHI!
I'M SO SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU, BUT YOU REALLY HELPED US OUT TODAY!
DON'T HOLD BACK- JUST KEEP DRINKING!
FILL 'ER UP...
FILL 'ER UP..
...WAY UP.
BY THE WAY, YUICHI, HOW ARE THINGS WITH THAT UG-I MEAN CHARMING GIRLFRIEND OF YOURS?
UHH...
I'M NOT SURE..
ISN'T IT TIME YOU THOUGHT ABOUT MAR-RIAGE?
NO...
BY THEN...
...IT MIGHT'VE ALL BEEN DECIDED ALREADY.


ゲームセンター
CHE=PARK
新類会員募集
CLUB YAYOI
DUN
DUN DUN
DUN
UMM...
CHAK
WE'RE CLOSED FOR LUNCH AT NOON ON SATUR-DAYS...

HELLO.
DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE?

谷川堂
Media
SIGH..
THIS TAKES ME BACK TO MY STUDENT DAYS.

WHAT KIND OF STUDENT WERE YOU...
...MR. ONODERA?
ME?
I WAS COMPLETELY AVERAGE.
BUT I WAS CONVINCED THAT I WAS SPECIAL, AND I WAS SEARCHING FOR THE THING THAT SET ME APART FROM EVERYONE ELSE...
WHEN I LOOK BACK ON IT NOW, I TELL MYSELF...
"I WAS SO YOUNG BACK THEN." BUT THAT'S JUST A JUSTIFICATION.
SO NOW...
...I SPEND MY DAYS LIVING IN FEAR OF SOMETHING SPILLING OUT OF MY HEART...
...LIKE WATER FROM A BOWL, ESCAPING THE LIMITS OF SURFACE TENSION.

I HAVE ACCEP-TANCE...
...BUT NOT SATISFAC-TION.
MR. ONO-DERA...
ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?
REALLY... I JUST WANT TO BE ABLE TO FOCUS ON MY POTTERY... THAT'S ALL.
BUT AS YOU GET OLDER ...
...YOU BECOME AFRAID OF LOSING THINGS, EVEN IF THEY'RE WORTHLESS.
SORRY ...
...I'M JUST BABBLING. MAYBE IT'S TIME TO GO HOME.

I...
ALL I WANT IS TO BE WITH THE PERSON I TREASURE.
WHAT ABOUT YOU...
WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPI-NESS IS?
VISITING HOURS
8:00 AM – 4:30 PM
NO GUESTS AFTER DARK
AH...
YOU'LL BE FINE!
I'M SURE YOU'LL FIND HAPPINESS ONE DAY!
LET'S BOTH FOCUS ON OUR GOALS, STARTING TOMOR-ROW.
DON'T LET THE BULLYING GET YOU DOWN.

I...
I'M NOT BEING BULLIED.
A BOY IN MY CLASS GOT ME PREGNANT...
...AND I HAD AN ABORTION SIX MONTHS AGO.

I DON'T CARE ...
... THAT MY FRIENDS TURNED THEIR BACKS ON ME AND ALL MY CLASSMATES TALK ABOUT ME BEHIND MY BACK.
BUT MY MOM...
SCHOOL ONLY LASTS THREE YEARS.
THERE'S SOME-THING WRONG WITH HER...
SHE SAYS IT'S TO PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN...
BUT WHEN I'M AT HOME, I REALLY AM TIED TO A POST.
I'M PROBABLY GOING TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE...
... GROWING OLD, STUCK ALONE IN A SMALL ROOM.

I PUSHED MY MOM AND PRACTICALLY RAN AWAY TO GET HERE TODAY..
I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHE'LL DO TO ME WHEN I GET HOME.
I MIGHT...
...END UP DEAD.

HELP ME!

GOODNIGHT PUNPUN INIO ASANO
Part Three

BACKGROUND ASSISTANTS Yuki Toribuchi
Satsuki Sato
CG ASSISTANT Hisashi Saito
COOPERATION Kumatsuto
Yasumasa Iwama
Yu Uehara

START
START FROM THE BEGINNING
BONUS STAGE!
FINISH
TREASURE CHEST

GOODNIGHT PUNPUN

Part Four

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PUNPUN ONODERA
A young, choco pie–loving guy. His favorite killer move is Shinku Hadoken from *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*.

MAMA ONODERA
Punpun's mother. She believes she was an angel in a past life. A bit of an alcoholic.

YUICHI ONODERA
Mama's younger brother. He's at an age where he can't be honest with himself. Currently working part-time at a video store.

AIKO TANAKA
The girl Punpun has loved since elementary school.

MIDORI OKUMA
She works part-time at a café but used to be a nurse.

YAGUCHI
A senior member of the badminton team. Rumor among the younger team members is that he has a huge dick.

KOMATSU
Punpun's classmate. The red comet of the badminton team.

MASUMI SEKI
Punpun's classmate. Has a very short fuse.

SHIMIZU
Punpun's classmate. Gets yelled at a lot.

NUMATA
The sexiest girl in class. Her favorite food is sesame seeds.

MRS. YAGI
A student at the pottery school where Yuichi worked five years ago.

A HIGH SCHOOLER WITH A SASSY HAIRCUT
Mrs. Yagi's daughter. She asks Yuichi for help, saying her mother is keeping her prisoner at home.

WASHIO
Yuichi's coworker at the pottery school. A rising star in the pottery world.

YUICHI'S EX-GIRLFRIEND
Aside from drinking a lot and gossiping about people, a gentle and kind woman.

CONTENTS

Chapter 35 209
Chapter 36 226
Chapter 37 245
Chapter 38 261
Chapter 39 279
Chapter 40 297
Chapter 41 315
Chapter 42 341
Chapter 43 359
Chapter 44 379
Chapter 45 398
Chapter 46 419

STORY THUS FAR...

Punpun, an incredibly ordinary middle school student, is embroiled in a foolhardy contest with a senior member of the badminton team over Aiko Tanaka, his unrequited (?) love.

☆ Chapter 35 ★

...AND I DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE TO THINK.
IN A FLASH, THE RAIN HAD INTENSIFIED...

RRMBL
RRMBL
RRMBL

HERE'S SOME HERBAL TEA.
DRINK— IT'LL HELP CALM YOU DOWN.
KINDA!

R
R
MM
M
BL
RR
M
MM
MM
BL

POWER'S OUT.
OH...

RR
R
M
MM
BL
TH
U
D

MMM!!
MM...
...
MMM!
AHH
...
AHH
...
AH!

YES...
YES!
YES...
YES!
MMMM
...
YES!

CHAK
CHAK
CHAK
SHK
CHAK
STOP IT!
STOP!

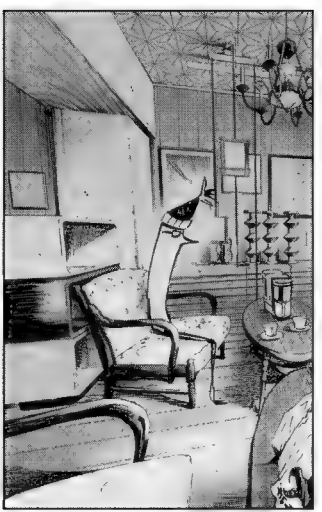
I DON'T WANT TO STOP.
TH... THIS ...
... THIS IS A BAD IDEA.
WHY?

WHY?
BECAUSE IT'S TOO SUDDEN ...
AND I'M WAY TOO OLD FOR YOU.
THAT..
...DOESN'T MATTER.
WHAT ARE YOU SO AFRAID OF?

YOU'RE NOT SATISFIED WITH YOUR LIFE NOW, RIGHT?
YOU'RE ...
... THE ONLY ONE FOR ME, YUICHI.
YOU SAID, "I'M SURE YOU'LL FIND HAPPINESS."
WHY DON'T YOU...
... FIND IT WITH ME?

I...
I...
UNFORTU-
NATELY...
...I
CAN'T
HELP...
...YOU.

YUI!
ARE YOU HOME?
NOK NOK NOK
I'M COMING IN.



Chapter 36

YU-IIII.
I'M COMING IN.
GYAAAH!

WASN'T THAT LIGHTNING AMAZING?!
OH, THIS SUCKS. EVEN MY UNDER-WEAR'S SOAKED.
UM..
WHAT'S UP? THIS IS A SURPRISE.
HOW LONG IS THIS BLACKOUT GONNA LAST? THE ELECTRIC COMPANY SHOULD BE BETTER AT DEALING WITH THINGS LIKE THIS.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, A SURPRISE?
I ALWAYS COME OVER.
OH...
...YEAH, OF COURSE YOU DO.
BESIDES, I TOLD YOU WE WERE GOING TO DO SOMETHING TONIGHT.
REMEMBER, I ASKED YOU TO KEEP SATURDAY OPEN?
ERRR..
YOU IDIOT, WEREN'T YOU LISTENING?
UM...
...YEAH, UM, SORRY.
SO, WHAT IS IT THAT WE'RE DOING?

WELL...
...MY PARENTS WERE GOING TO YOKOHAMA FOR THE DAY...
...SO I THOUGHT THEY COULD STOP HERE AND WE COULD ALL HAVE DINNER IN CHINA-TOWN.
BUT THE TRAINS ...
...AREN'T RUNNING BECAUSE OF THE STORM, SO THEY'RE STUCK...
WE'LL DO IT ANOTHER TIME.
OHH... HA HA. GOT IT!
WELL ...
...WHY DON'T YOU GO HAVE A BATH? YOU DON'T WANT TO CATCH A COLD.
"GOT IT"? YOU'RE BEING AWFULLY CASUAL ABOUT THIS.
YUI, YOU DO UNDER-STAND WHAT THIS WAS ABOUT, RIGHT?

UH... UMM...
WHY DON'T WE...
...UM, GO OUT TO DINNER AND TALK ABOUT IT?
REE REE
YOU'RE ACTING WEIRD, YUI.
DO YOU REALLY...
...HATE TALKING ABOUT MARRIAGE SO MUCH?
I THINK I'VE...
...HUNG IN FOR AS LONG AS I CAN.
I...

WE'VE BEEN GOING OUT FOR FIVE YEARS NOW...
...AND I'M GOING TO BE THIRTY SOON.
YUKKO AND KANNA AND AKI... ALL MY COLLEGE FRIENDS ARE GETTING MARRIED.
HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT HOW I FEEL, GETTING LEFT BEHIND?
IN THAT INSTANT...
...I FELT WHATEVER IT WAS I'D BEEN DESPERATELY TRYING TO SUSTAIN CRUMBLE.
DO YOU REMEMBER...?
RIGHT AFTER YOU STARTED WORKING, WE WENT TO THAT AMUSEMENT PARK IN NASU, AND ON THE FERRIS WHEEL...
...YOU SAID, "WHEN THINGS SETTLE DOWN AT WORK, LET'S GET MARRIED."
I WAS CAUGHT UP IN THOUGHTS OF THE 16-YEAR-OLD GIRL ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLOSET DOOR AND THE AROUSAL HER INTENSE GAZE WAS CAUSING.
THE TRIVIAL WORDS SPILLING OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE WOMAN IN FRONT OF ME JUST BOUNCED OFF MY EARS.

I...
...BELIEVED YOU THEN, YUI...
AND I'VE JUST...
...HUNG IN THERE.
LITTLE BY LITTLE, MY CONSCIOUSNESS WAS OVERWHELMED BY THE IMAGE OF THE UNDERWEAR I'D GLIMPSED BETWEEN HER THIGHS, AND...
...AFTER A SIDELONG GLANCE AT THE ROTTEN TOMATO OF MY GIRLFRIEND'S FACE...
...BY PERSISTENT FANTASIES OF HER PALE YOUNG BREASTS AND SPARSE, AS YET UNGLIMPSED PUBIC HAIRS.
B-BUT...!
I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL...
SO I WON'T FORCE YOU...
I WON'T, BUT...
UGH, IF THIS WAS HOW IT WAS GOING TO PLAY OUT...
...I SHOULD'VE STUFFED MY COCK IN THE GIRL THE FIRST CHANCE I GOT!

ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU...
...SAY YOU LOVE ME!
UHN UHN UH N OH YEAH UHN UHN FUCK ME UHN UHN YEAH DO IT UHN UHN HARDER
OHH...
...HEAVEN.

I...
I...
I...
I LOVE YOU.
I LOVE YOU.
...IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER IF I'D NEVER BEEN BORN.
...I THOUGHT...
IN THE MIDST OF THIS VOMITOUS SITUATION...
OH...
SIGH ...
YOU'RE SO SILLY..
...YUI.
SOMETHING INSIDE ME..
...BURST.
OH...
...YOU'RE HARD.

OH ...!
YUI ...
YUI! YUI!
IF I'M GOING TO FALL...
...I MIGHT AS WELL GO ALL THE WAY.
OH ...
OH MY...
OH MY GOD!

TOO MUCH!
NO!
WHY ...?!
WHAT?!
OH ...
WHOA!
AH HH HH!

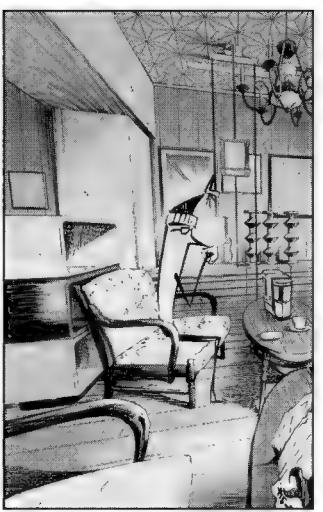
I GET IT...
THIS IS A DREAM!

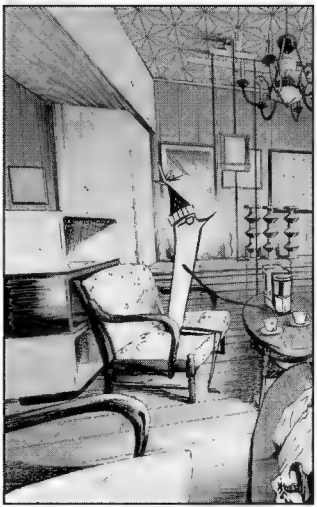
OH ...
THERE WAS NEVER A GIRL...
... WHOA, YUI!
I'M ...
I'M ...
WHEN I WAKE UP, IT'LL ALL RETURN TO NORMAL ...
... COM-ING...
I'M COM-ING!
RIGHT ...?
GOD?
... TINKLE ...
...DEAR GOD, DEAR GOD...
OH...

HOY!

Zz
T
Zzz
CLICK
KA
CLICK

THERE IS NO GOD.
JUST LIKE I THOUGHT...





OH...
UM...
DON'T ...
...TELL ANYONE, OKAY?

CH
AK
I NEEDED TIME TO THINK.
I TOOK TWO WEEKS OFF WITH THE LIE THAT I WAS GOING ABROAD.

...AND IN TEN DAYS, HER VERY EXISTENCE FELT LIKE AN ILLUSION.
BUT IN A COUPLE OF DAYS, I STARTED THINKING THAT THE ABORTION AND BEING KEPT PRISONER WERE ALL IN HER IMAGINATION...
CLUB YAYOI
EITHER WAY, I CHOSE THE INCONSE-QUENTIAL LIFE.
UMM...
...DO YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED?
IN A WAY, IT WAS A RELIEF.

UMM, SO LET'S BEGIN OUR INTERVIEW ...
MR. WASHIO, MY NAME IS NARUSE, AN EDITOR FROM LIVING WITH BEAUTY MONTHLY.
FIRST OFF, THIS LARGE CELADON POT HAS BEEN GETTING A LOT OF PRAISE AT OPEN EXHIBITIONS.
THE TENDENCY IN CONTEMPORARY POTTERY HAS BEEN TOWARDS THE AVANT-GARDE; BUT YOUR WORK IS A BOLT OUT OF THE BLUE. AND AT JUST 25 YEARS OLD..
...DIDN'T LAST.
BUT THAT FEELING...
UMMM ...
... HUH?
MR. WASHIO?

MR. ONODERA ...!
IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
HOW WAS MOROCCO?

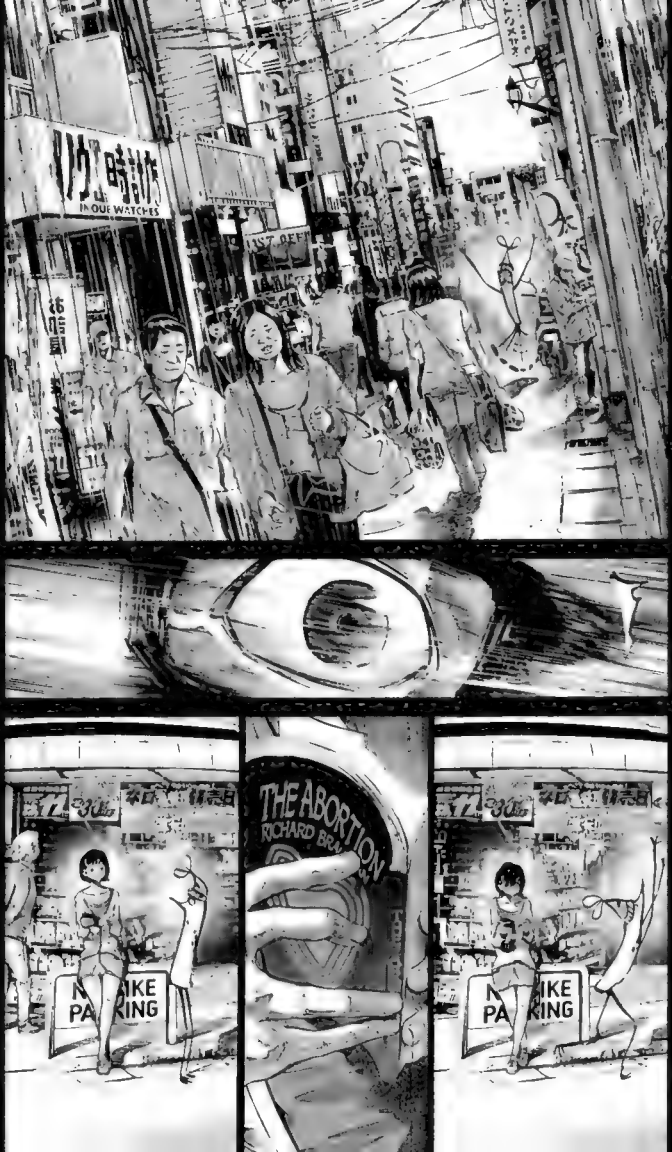
MR. ONODERA!
HOW COULD YOU GO AWAY FOR TWO WEEKS WITHOUT TELLING ME?
I WAS WORRIED YOU WERE GOING TO QUIT.
OH, I'M SORRY.
UH ...
YOUR DAUGHTER, DID SHE SAY ANYTHING TO YOU?
OH, WELL, SHE'S BEEN COMING HERE WHILE YOU WERE GONE...
SHE WAS HERE EARLIER TODAY.
I WONDER WHERE SHE'S GONE?
WHAT ...?
SHE WAS HERE TODAY?

NEVER MIND THAT, MR. ONODERA.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO OUT FOR DINNER, JUST THE TWO OF US?
THERE'S A LOVELY FUSION RESTAURANT THAT JUST OPENED IN JIYUGAOKA.
MRS. YAGI... I'M SORRY ...
MAYBE I'M... ...WAY OFF BASE HERE, BUT...
...DO YOU...
...KEEP YOUR DAUGHTER LOCKED UP IN YOUR HOUSE?
...
MY FRIEND FROM HIGH SCHOOL OPENED IT. IT'S ALWAYS BEEN HER DREAM.
SHE TRAINED FOR OVER TEN YEARS AT FRENCH RESTAURANTS ALL OVER THE WORLD, SO IT'S GUARANTEED TO BE DELICIOUS.

WASHIO?
JUST ANSWER THE QUES-TION...
ARE YOU TYING UP YOUR DAUGHTER AND KEEPING HER PRISONER?
AHHH, WELL...!
THE SMELL OF THE STEW AND THE TENDERNESS OF THE MEAT IS JUST...!
I'M SURE YOU'LL LOVE IT TOO.
ANSWER ...
... THE QUESTION.

AHHHH!
OH NOO!

NNMAARGH!!
W-WASHIO!
OW!!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
OW, OUCH!
MRS. YAGI...
HANG IN THERE, MRS. YAGI!
YES, HELLO... WE NEED AN AMBU-LANCE!
YUICHI!
GO FIND...
...A POLICE-MAN!


INOUE WATCHES
THE ABORTION
RICHARD BRA
NO BIKE PARKING
NO BIKE PARKING

OH.
SO MUCH BLOOD.
IS MY MOTHER...
...DEAD?

THE HELL WITH THIS !!
DID YOU...
...MAKE HIM DO IT?

IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT, APPARENTLY.
HEE HEE ...
HOW IS THAT EVEN A THING, WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW ANY-THING ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON?
I FELT..
...A SHIVER RUN DOWN MY SPINE AT HER SMILE...
...SO BEAUTIFUL IT WAS ALMOST SCARY.
WELL, WASHIO SAID..
...HE WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR ME.
HE HESITATED AT FIRST..
...BUT MEN ARE SO EASY.
I JUST GAVE HIM A LITTLE HEAD, AND SUDDENLY HE WANTED TO DO IT.
HOW FUNNY!

BUT...
...IT'S HUMAN NATURE TO MINDLESSLY PURSUE BEAUTY...
...AND TO BE TOYED WITH...
I NEVER...
...SHOULD HAVE TOUCHED HER.
...AND TO DESTROY.

UHHN...
EHHHN...
W-WASHIO...!
W-WASHIO...!
YOU CAN'T OPEN THE KILN WHEN IT'S ON!
HEY, STOP..
IT'S DANGER-OUS!
WHOOSH
CREAK
HSOO WH

WELL ...
I'M GONNA GO...
BIKE RKING
WH ...
WHERE ...
...ARE YOU GOING?

I DON'T KNOW.
BUT IT'S...
...NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.
NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ME.

GOD ALWAYS ...
...WATCHES OVER ME.

"WHAT GOOT."
THAT'S WHEN I THOUGHT...

I WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HER GOD.

...WHETHER GOD EXISTS OR NOT.

AND I DIDN'T MEAN...

MAYBE HUMAN NATURE WOULD MAKE US CLING TO IT ANYWAY.

LET'S SAY THE ENTITY WE CALL GOD TURNS OUT TO BE A DEMON.

...SEEMED JUST A LITTLE MORE DISTORTED THAN USUAL.
AS SOON AS THAT THOUGHT CROSSED MY MIND, THE SCENE BEFORE ME...
...I FINALLY REALIZED THAT...
WATCHING HER DISAPPEAR INTO THE CROWD...
...THE MOMENT I MET HER...
...I HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER.

...SHE'D RETURN TO ME FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE CROWD.

IT FELT LIKE IF I CALLED HER NAME...

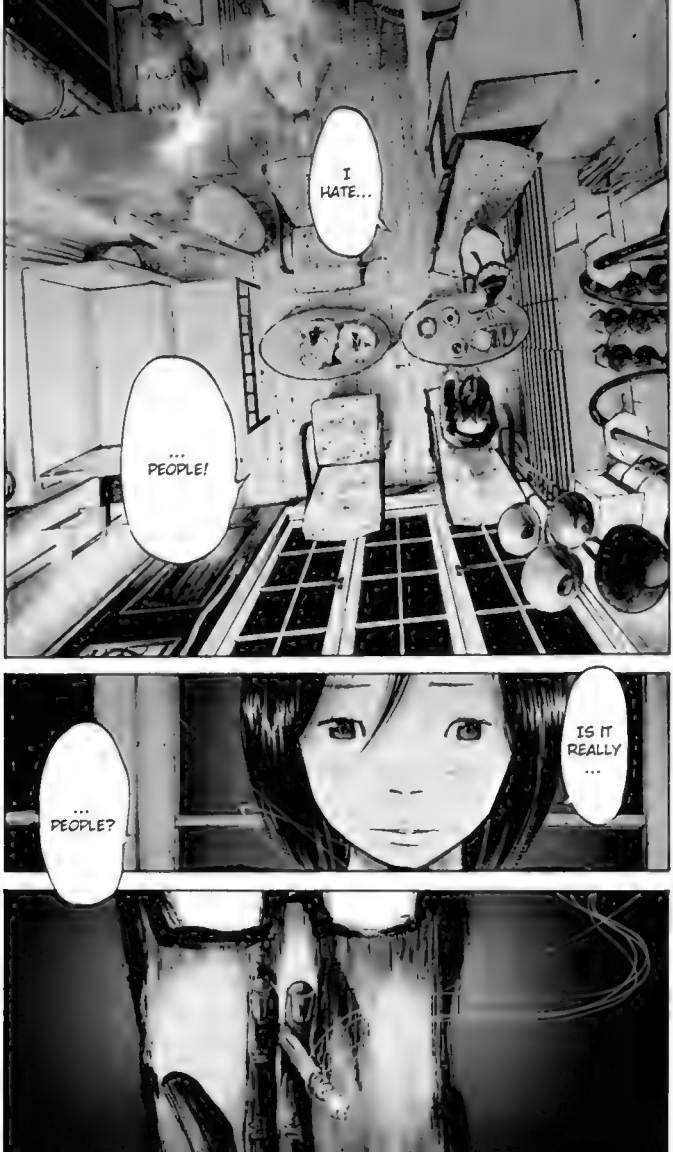
...I NEVER KNEW HER NAME.

BUT...

EVERY-
THING
ABOUT
WHAT
HAPPENED
FIVE YEARS
AGO.
THIS

DOES IT
DISGUST
YOU?
YES

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS ...
THINGS WENT SOUR WITH MY GIRLFRIEND AFTER THAT, AND WE BROKE UP.
I'VE LIVED WITHOUT HELP, WITHOUT BELIEFS... WITHOUT THINKING.
THE POTTERY SCHOOL DIDN'T GO OUT OF BUSINESS, BUT I HEARD IT WAS HARD FOR IT TO BOUNCE BACK FROM THAT.
TWO PEOPLE WERE INJURED.
I USED THE SUBSEQUENT CHAOS TO QUIT.
WHAT REASON IS THERE TO GO ON LIVING IN LIGHT OF THAT?
PEOPLE PIERCING EACH OTHER WITH THE THORNS OF THEIR EGOS...
I... ...JUST DON'T UNDER-STAND.
PEOPLE ARE...


I HATE...
... PEOPLE!
IS IT REALLY ...
... PEOPLE?

I HATE...
... MYSELF.
CLENCH

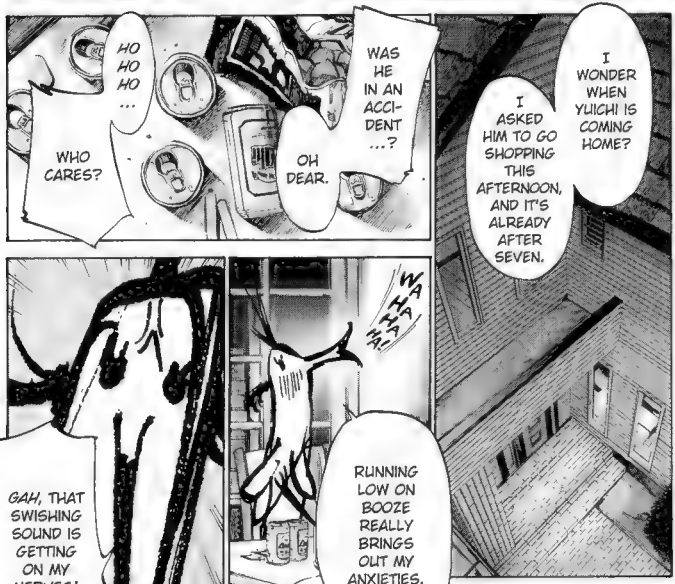
I LIKE YOU.
I LIKE YOU, YUICHI.

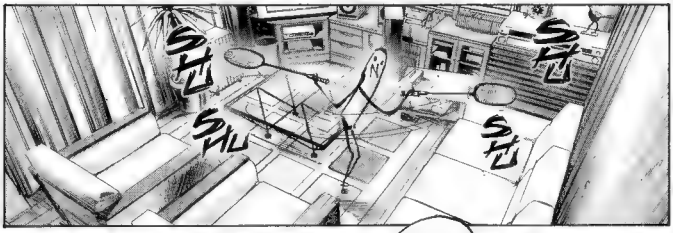
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED BACK THEN...
...I LIKE WHO YOU ARE NOW.

I...
..I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU.
THAT'S NOT TRUE!
YOU DON'T WANT TO GET HURT, RIGHT?

LET'S GO.
LET'S GO TO THE POTTERY SCHOOL ...
WHERE YOU USED TO WORK.

HA HA HA HA!


I WONDER WHEN YUICHI IS COMING HOME?
I ASKED HIM TO GO SHOPPING THIS AFTERNOON, AND IT'S ALREADY AFTER SEVEN.
WAS HE IN AN ACCI-DENT ...?
OH DEAR.
HO HO HO ...
WHO CARES?
WA HA HA HA!
RUNNING LOW ON BOOZE REALLY BRINGS OUT MY ANXIETIES.
GAH, THAT SWISHING SOUND IS GETTING ON MY NERVES!

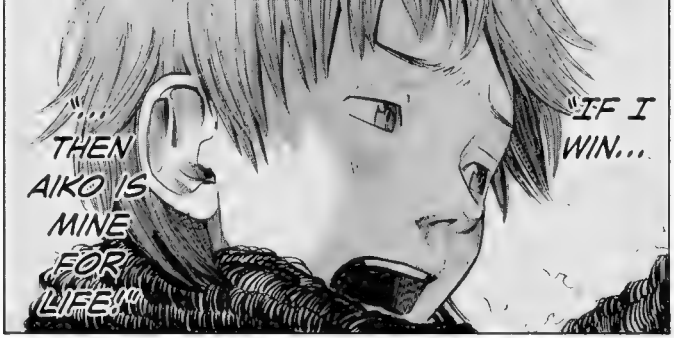


Punpun was swinging away in preparation for the badminton tournament the next day.

HEY, YOU'RE NOT EVEN AN ALTERNATE, ARE YOU?

IS THERE A POINT TO ALL THAT SWINGING? WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO TO BED?

Punpun was aware of that, but something was bursting out of him, and he couldn't hold it back.



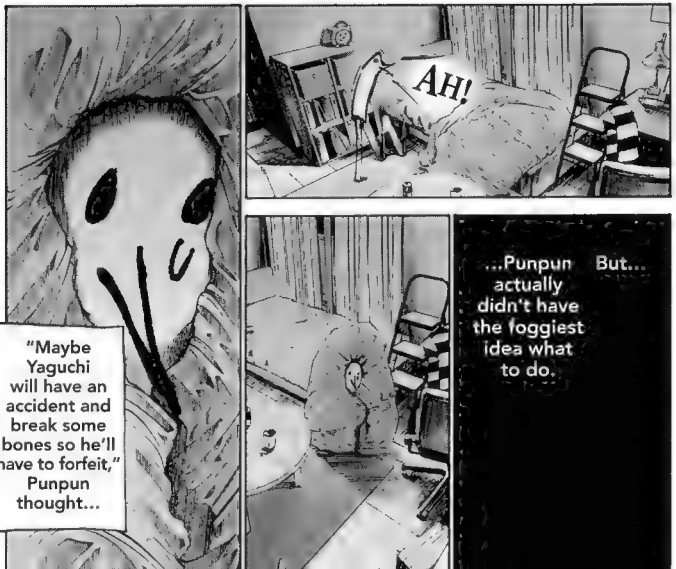
There was no way Punpun was going to hand Aiko over to someone who'd let a first-year curse him out!

"Yo, Yaguchi!"

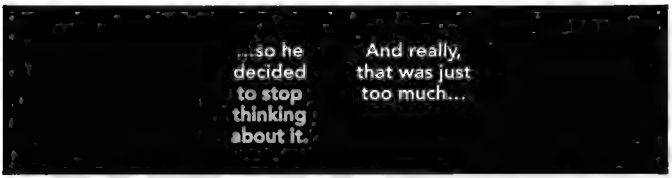
"I'm going to call him names in my head!

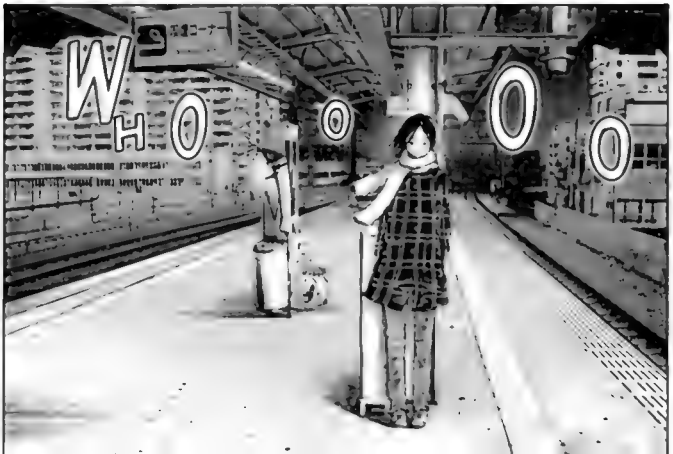
"What a selfish asshole!

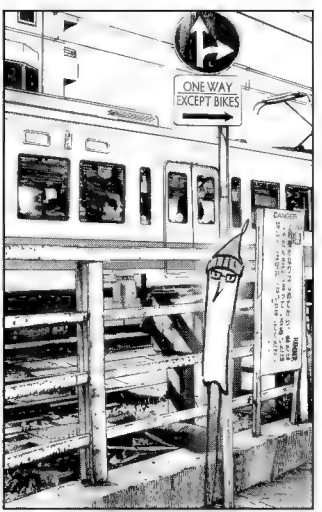
"For fuck's sake!


"Maybe Yaguchi will have an accident and break some bones so he'll have to forfeit," Punpun thought...
AH!
...Punpun actually didn't have the foggiest idea what to do.
But...

But then Punpun felt something ominous lurking behind him.


...so he decided to stop thinking about it.
And really, that was just too much...


WHOOOO


ONE WAY
EXCEPT BIKES
DANGER

PARKING
FINES
IN
EFFECT

HONESTLY, I WAS SCARED.
KLAKKA

KLAKKA
KLAKKA
I FELT LIKE I WAS GOING TO DISCOVER SOMETHING TERRIBLE, SOMETHING I'D RATHER NOT KNOW.

TATUI
DOME POTTERY SCI
DOME POTTERY SCI
BARA REAL ESTAT
JOEGIA

WELL, I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME...
I WAS ACTUALLY PRETTY WORRIED ABOUT YOU, YUICHI.
IT WAS SO CHAOTIC BACK THEN— I DIDN'T EVEN ASK YOU WHY YOU WERE QUITTING.

I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D TURN UP AGAIN WITH SUCH A CUTE GIRL-FRIEND.
IT'S GREAT TO SEE YOU LOOKING SO WELL.

UM... WELL...
...YES.
ACTUALLY, WASHIO COMES TO VISIT FROM TIME TO TIME.
HE'S REALLY TURNED HIS LIFE AROUND.
HE WON'T TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED, BUT HE'S SMILING MORE THAN HE USED TO.

UM... WHAT ABOUT MRS. YAGI?
YEAH, WE WERE IN MEDIATION FOR A LONG TIME OVER THAT.
HER INJURIES WEREN'T SERIOUS, BUT IF SHE HAD SUED, WE WOULDN'T BE AROUND ANYMORE.
BUT I HEARD MRS. YAGI'S DAUGHTER MADE HER STOP.
HUH?
YOU REMEMBER, MRS. YAGI STARTED BRINGING HER RIGHT BEFORE IT HAPPENED ...
THE PALE GIRL WITH THE SHORT HAIR.
I DON'T KNOW WHY SHE DEFENDED US.
OH YEAH...
...SOME OF THE STUDENTS MENTIONED THAT SHE'S STUDYING POTTERY AT AN ART COLLEGE IN KYOTO NOW.

HMM? WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING.
OH, THIS IS A NICE CUP.
HA HA, I SEE YOU HAVEN'T LOST YOUR TOUCH.
THEY'RE SMALL AND ROUGH, BUT THEY HAVE A CERTAIN STYLE, DON'T YOU THINK?
THEY'RE WASHIO'S COMEBACK, AFTER FIVE LONG YEARS.

SO, LIM...
...SORRY FOR BARGING IN ON YOU.
NO, NO...
COME ANY-TIME.

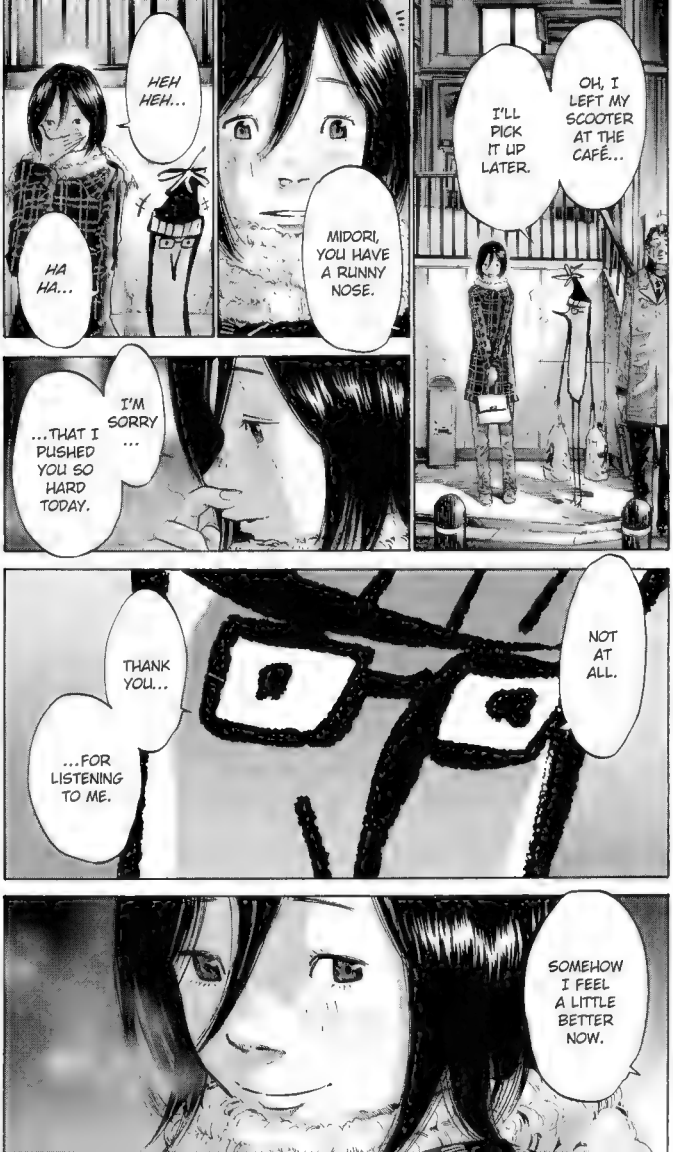
AND ...
...IF YOU WANT TO GET BACK INTO POTTERY...
CLUB YAYOI
...I'D LOVE TO WORK WITH YOU AGAIN.

UH!
..
..THAT WAS..
THAT WAS GOOD
..
.... RIGHT?
YEAH
...
..IT WAS GOOD.
IT WAS REALLY GOOD.
I WONDER
...
WAS I JUST BEING OVERLY ANXIOUS?

NO...
...I DON'T THINK THAT'S IT.
EVEN IF I WAS JUST OBSESSING OVER IT ALL THIS TIME...
...IT DOESN'T MAKE WHAT I DID GO AWAY, AND IT DOESN'T CHANGE MY BASIC NATURE.
MAYBE I'LL DO IT AGAIN SOMEDAY.

YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD.

IT'S GOTTEN REALLY COLD OUT...
WANT TO COME BACK TO THE CAFÉ SO YOU DON'T GET SICK?
HMM ...
...SINCE I'M IN OFUNA ANYWAY, MAYBE I'LL STOP BY MY FOLKS'...
TAXI
タクシー
のりば


OH, I LEFT MY SCOOTER AT THE CAFÉ...
I'LL PICK IT UP LATER.
MIDORI, YOU HAVE A RUNNY NOSE.
HEH HEH...
HA HA...
I'M SORRY ...
...THAT I PUSHED YOU SO HARD TODAY.
NOT AT ALL.
THANK YOU...
...FOR LISTENING TO ME.
SOMEHOW I FEEL A LITTLE BETTER NOW.

...A COMPLETE LIE.
THAT WAS...
...WAS DEFINITELY GUILT OVER THE MISTAKES OF MY PAST.
THE BURDEN I'D BEEN CARRYING FOR FIVE YEARS...
...SOMEHOW THE WEIGHT IS HEAVIER AND MORE PAINFUL THAN EVER.
BUT NOW THAT I CAN SEE A GLIMMER OF LIGHT...
BECAUSE I REALIZED
MY HEART FROZE...

WHAT IF THE VERY ACT OF SEARCHING FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE IS MY REASON FOR LIVING?!

ALL ALONE, WRITHING IN AGONY FROM THE CRIPPLING GUILT...

UNABLE TO MOVE A MUSCLE BECAUSE OF TERRIFYING GUILT...

...THEN I HAVE NOTHING LEFT..
IF THAT'S TRUE...

BONG
BONG
BONG
BONG
MY PENANCE IS COMPLETE..
BONG

THE ONLY THING LEFT...

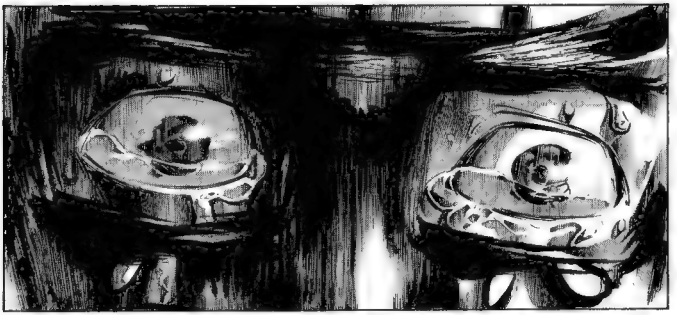
...AND AN EMPTY FUTURE.
...OF A MEANINGLESS LIFE...
...IS TERROR...

...THE ONLY GOD...
IS GUILT...
DO NOT

PROOT
PROOT
PROOT

...I'VE FOLLOWED?

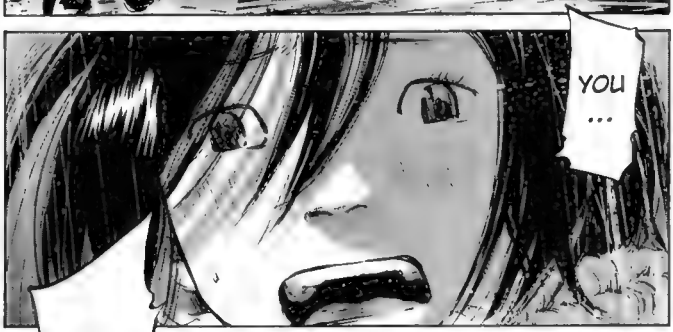
SO LONELY...
SO COLD...
SO TERRIFYING...
SO AGONIZING...



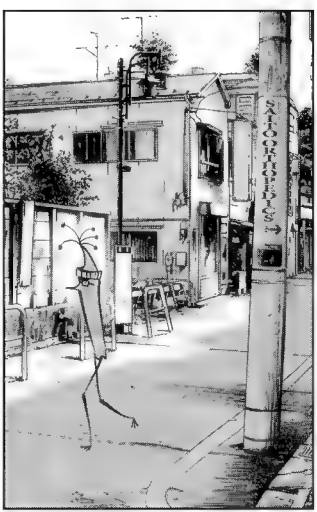
I CAN'T DO IT ANYMORE.

WALK

BONG
BONG
BONG
BONG
BONG


YOU
...

...
IDIOT!


SATO ORTHOPEDICS

BONG
BONG
BONG
BONG
BONG

I COULDN'T ...
...DO IT.
RMMM
BL
RMMM
BL

AT THE LAST MINUTE...
...I COULDN'T DO IT!

OH...
OH...
SOB ...

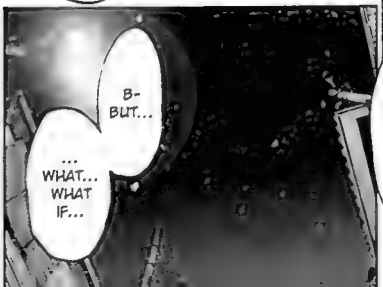
H-
HELP
...
HELP
ME...
HEE
HEE
...
"HELP
ME"...

WHY ARE
YOU SO
MUCH
TROUBLE...
...
YUICHI?

WAHH!
WAHH!

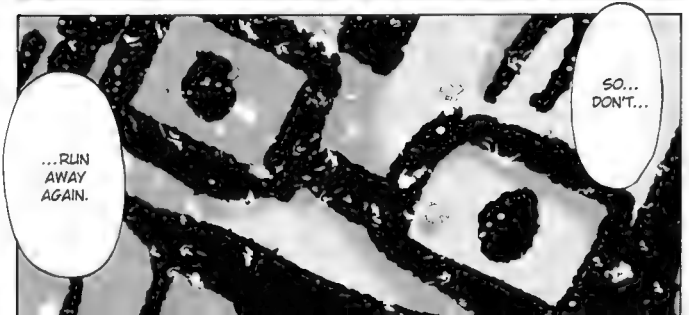
...LEAVE ME AGAIN.
JUST DON'T EVER...

IT'S OKAY...
I'LL DO WHATEVER YOU WANT, YUICHI.

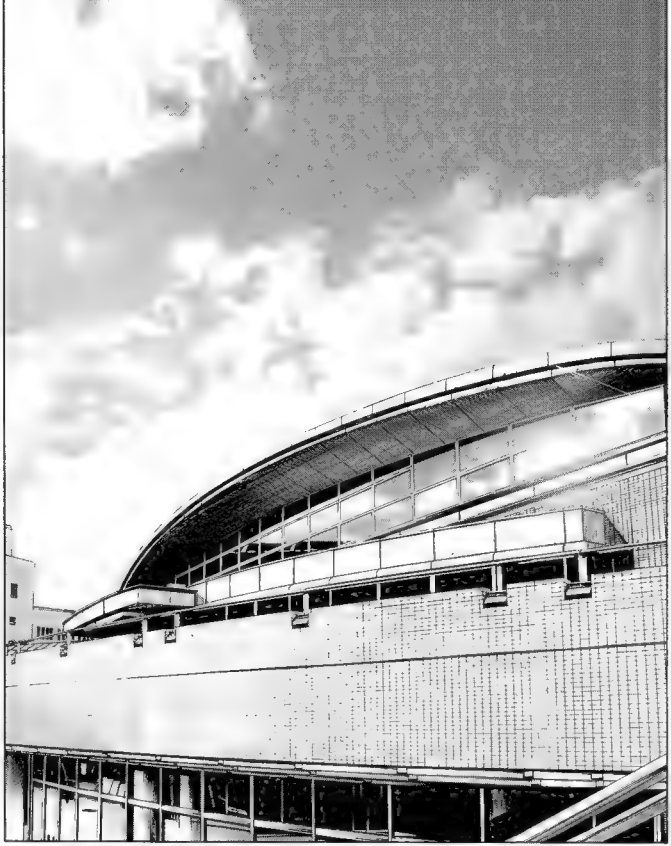

B-BUT...
... WHAT... WHAT IF...

...I MAKE ANOTHER TERRIBLE MISTAKE THAT CAN'T BE FIXED...
...AND I HURT YOU?
IF THAT HAPPENS ...
...I WANT YOU...
...TO KILL ME.

DON'T WORRY...
...IF THAT HAPPENS, I WILL *DEFINITELY* KILL YOU.


SO... DON'T...
...RUN AWAY AGAIN.

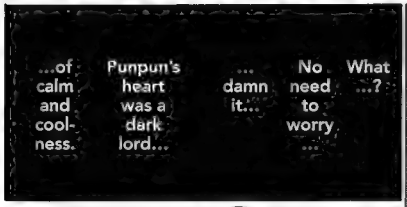
UM ...
MIDORI...
I LOVE YOU.
YEAH.



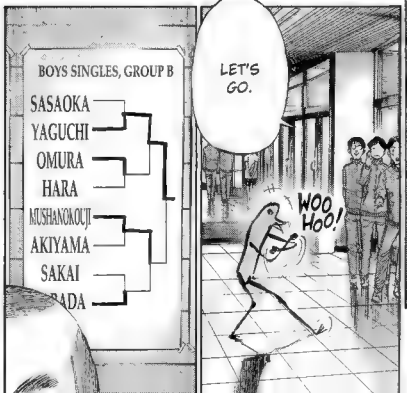
THERN PREFECTURE BADMINTON TOURNA

HIS OPPONENT STARTED CRYING IN THE SECOND SET...
I'VE NEVER SEEN A MATCH LIKE THAT.
DID YOU SEE KOMATSU'S MATCH THIS MORNING?
IT WAS WICKED. SERIOUSLY, NO ONE CAN BEAT HIM.
YAGUCHI IS THE ONLY OTHER ONE LEFT FROM OUR SCHOOL.
I HEAR HE MADE THE IBARAKI PREFECTURE TEAM IN HIS FIRST YEAR AT HIS LAST SCHOOL.
AHA HA, BUT IF BY SOME MIRACLE HE WINS, HE'LL FACE KOMATSU IN THE FINAL.
WHO'S HE UP AGAINST NEXT...?
OH, IT'S MUSHANOKOJI, WHO JUST TRANSFERRED TO NISHI MIDDLE SCHOOL.
POOR YAGUCHI ...
...HE'S DONE FOR.

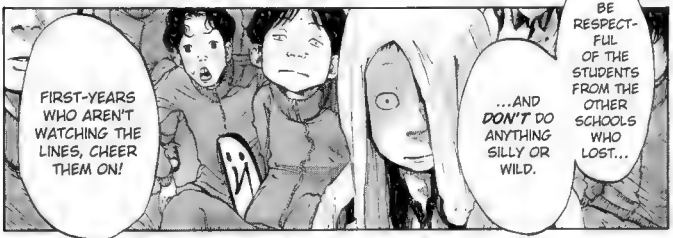
BWA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA


What ...?
No need to worry ...
... damn it...
Punpun's heart was a dark lord...
...of calm and cool-ness.

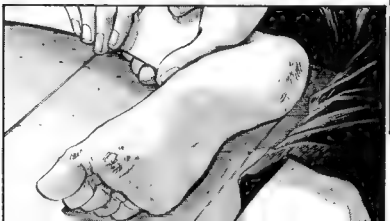
HYA HA HA HA HA
WHAP
WHAP


BOYS SINGLES, GROUP B
SASAOKA
YAGUCHI
OMURA
HARA
MUSHANOKOUJI
AKIYAMA
SAKAI
LET'S GO.
WOO HOO!

...IT TURNS OUT THE SINGLES FINAL IS BETWEEN YAGUCHI AND KOMATSU, BOTH STUDENTS FROM OUR SCHOOL.
HMM...
...SO...


FIRST-YEARS WHO AREN'T WATCHING THE LINES, CHEER THEM ON!
...AND DON'T DO ANYTHING SILLY OR WILD.
BE RESPECTFUL OF THE STUDENTS FROM THE OTHER SCHOOLS WHO LOST...

YOU'RE DISMISSED.



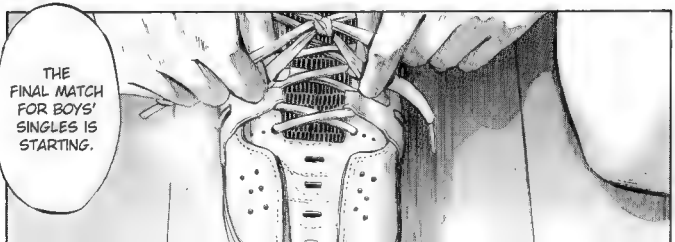
HMM ...?
WHAT'S WRONG, YAGUCHI? DID YOU TWIST IT?
NO, IT'S FINE.
WELL, DON'T PUSH IT. YOU'RE PLAYING KOMATSU.
REMEMBER, SECOND PLACE STILL GETS YOU INTO THE PREFECTURE TOURNA-MENT.

KOMATSU, GO FOR IT!
I DON'T LIKE YAGUCHI— HE'S TOO COCKY.
SWAT HIM LIKE A FLY!
Punpun decided he wouldn't watch the match after all. He'd go home, eat a choco pie and go to bed instead.
SHUT UP...
WHY ARE YOU BRINGING UP ALL THAT NEGATIVE STUFF RIGHT BEFORE MY MATCH?
I WANT A NOBLE WIN, DEVOID OF USELESS EMOTION.
HUH? WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT ...?
WHAT-EVER.
EHH...
I REALLY DON'T CARE WHO WINS.
MAYBE I'LL JUST GO HOME...
PUSSY, PUSSY.

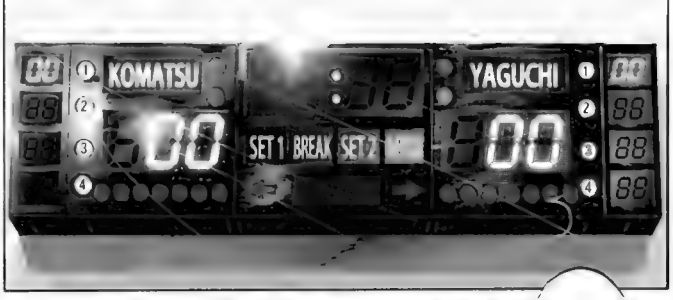
PUSSY.

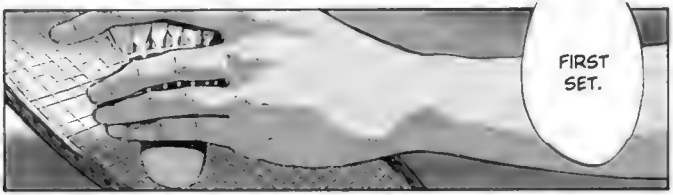
"It's Aiko!"

She's looking at me!

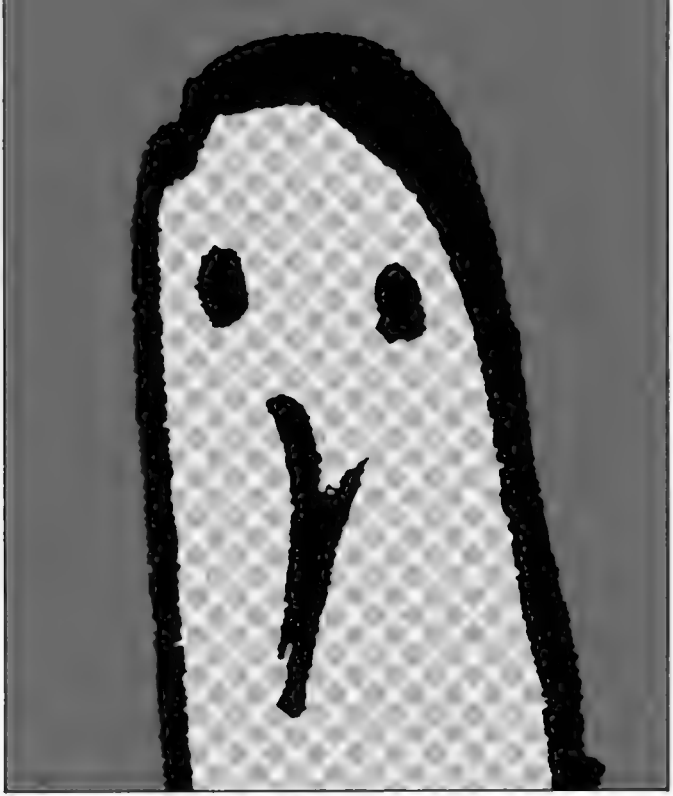

THE FINAL MATCH FOR BOYS' SINGLES IS STARTING.

ATHLETES!
TO THE CENTER OF THE COURT!

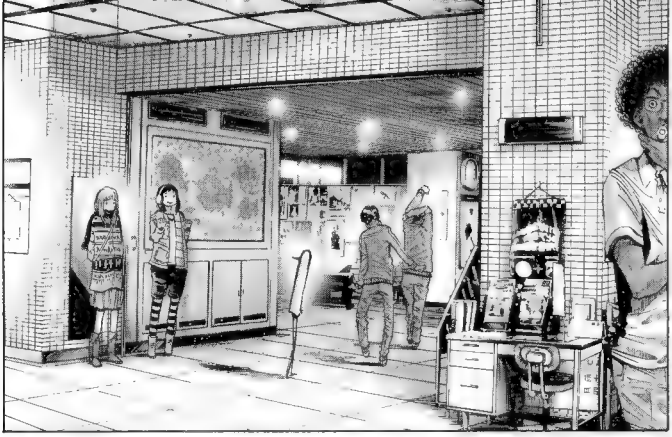

KOMATSU
YAGUCHI
SET 1
BREAK
SET 2


FIRST SET.

LOVE ALL, PLAY!



Punpun...



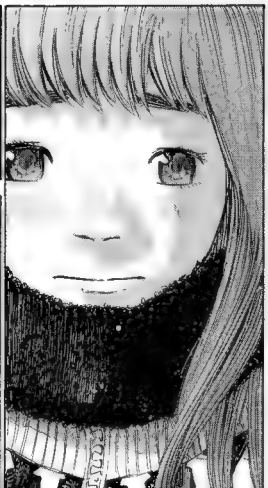
...couldn't move a muscle for some reason.

...for so long before.

He had never stared into Aiko's eyes...

...in her wide, gorgeous eyes.

He wondered how he was reflected...



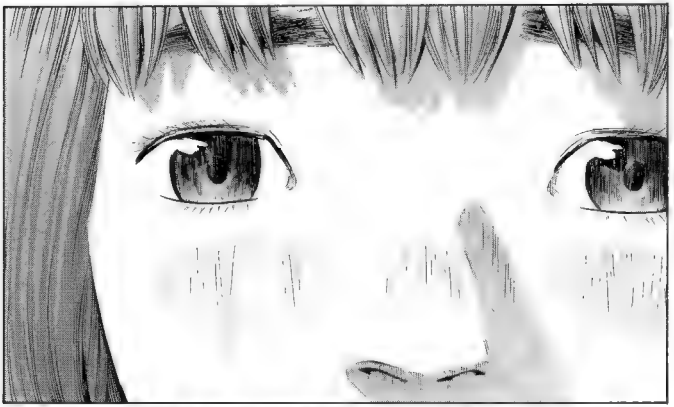
She's still looking this Way!

She's definitely looking!
She's totally looking!

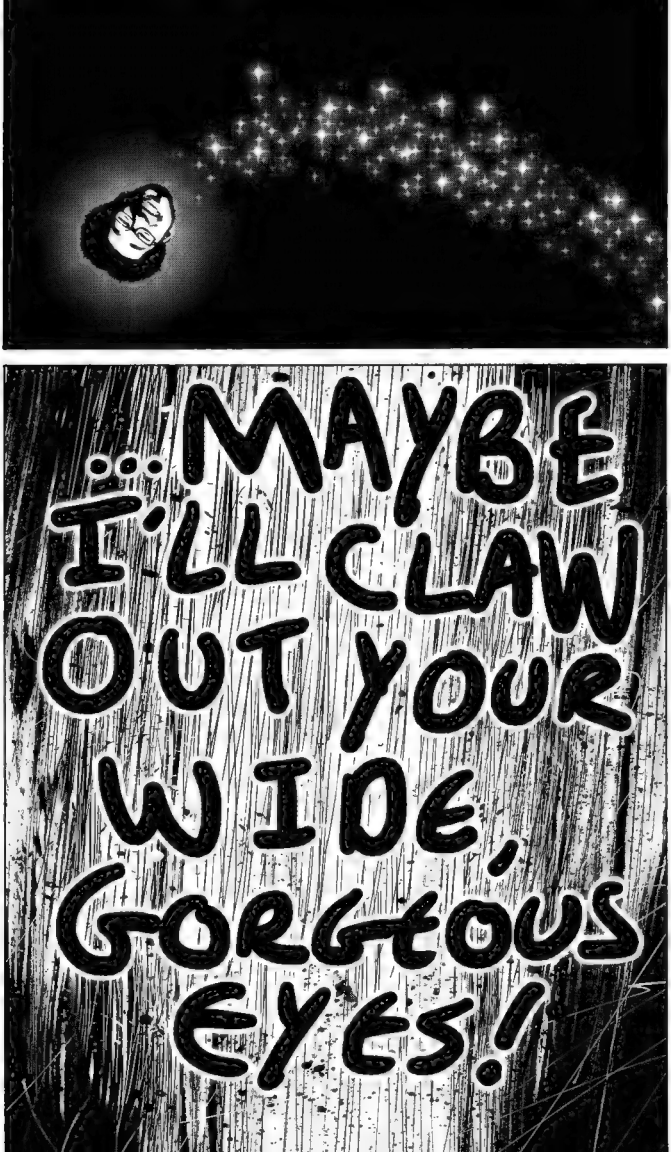
...who seemed to have something she wanted to tell him. Punpun was powerless.

But it was all he could do to keep his knees from shaking in front of Aiko...

Punpun wanted to run away.



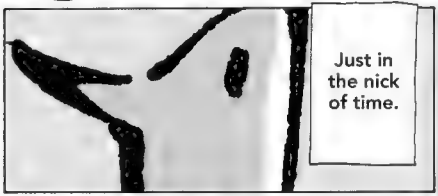
Whoa, if you keep looking at me like that...

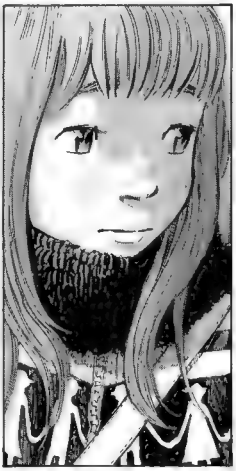

MAYBE I'LL CLAW OUT YOUR WIDE, GORGEOUS EYES!

With everything that was careening through his mind, Punpun...

...was ready to explode!

HEY.
IT'S TANAKA AND NUMATA.
WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING HERE?


Just in the nick of time.



Way to go, Punpun!
Actually, Punpun was showing off how in control he was.

I THINK THE MATCH HAS ALREADY STARTED.
YOU'RE HERE TO WATCH YAGUCHI, RIGHT?
OH, RIGHT.
I GET IT. THAT'S WHAT'S GOING ON.

"...THEN AIKO IS MINE FOR LIFE!"
"IF I WIN...

Punpun wouldn't really have minded if Mt. Fuji had erupted right then.

WHACK
SKWK
SKWK

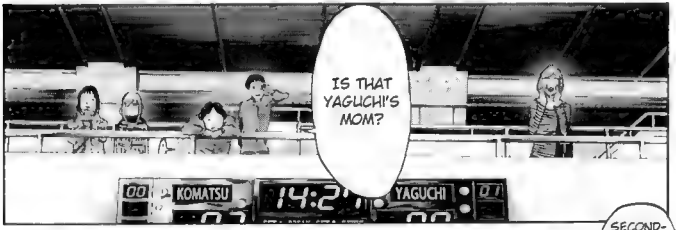
WHACK
WHACK
WHACK
WHACK

NO WAY.
14:25
SET 1
BREAK
SET 2
YAGUCHI
TO
NK

I THOUGHT FOR SURE YAGUCHI WOULD GET DESTROYED.
OH, SORRY.
HE'S ACTUALLY TAKEN THE FIRST SET!
WHOA, YAGUCHI IS IN THE LEAD.
ATSU
14:25
YAGUCHI
03
09

WHAAAT?!

WHACK
WONK
WONK
MAMORU!
GO FOR IT!


IS THAT YAGUCHI'S MOM?
KOMATSU
14:2
YAGUCHI

Punpun suddenly had a really bad feeling.
SECOND-YEAR GETTING LAID LEFT AND RIGHT HUNG LIKE A MONSTER MUSHROOM MAMA'S BOY.
WELL, WHATEVER. PUSSY, PUSSY.

...now and forever, would never turn out the way he wanted.
Maybe his life...
KOMATSU
888
WINK
SOPT!!

...and then, depending on how things went, they'd head to his room and have sex and all that.

He'd smooch with Aiko on the bus home...

Yaguchi was going to win, one way or another.

KOMATSU...
...IT'S PATHETIC TO BE THAT OBSESSED WITH WINNING.
...Punpun should never have agreed to the wager.
If he was going to be this pathetic about it...
That's right.
WERE YOU EVEN PAYING ATTENTION?
SHAKE
SHAKE
WHAT?! IN?!
IT'S ABSURD THAT A LUDICROUS MISTAKE BY AN EMPTY-HEADED IDIOT LIKE YOU...
SHAKE
SHAKE
SHAKE
SHAKE
...IS INFLUENCING THE OUTCOME OF MY BEAUTIFUL WIN!
IT WAS OUT.

I'm just a garnish for your lives!

I don't care if you forget me!

"I wonder what would have happened if I'd lost that day? *Ha ha ha.* Do you remember the guy? His name was Onodera."

"When we were in middle school, I made a bet on a match with you as the prize.

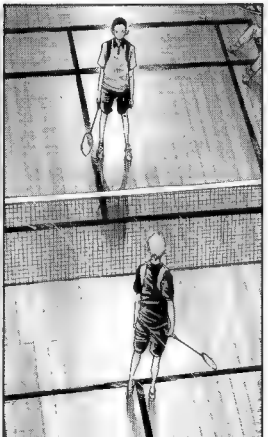
Years from now, the always cool and correct Yaguchi will turn to Aiko on the eve of their wedding and say...

Yeah.

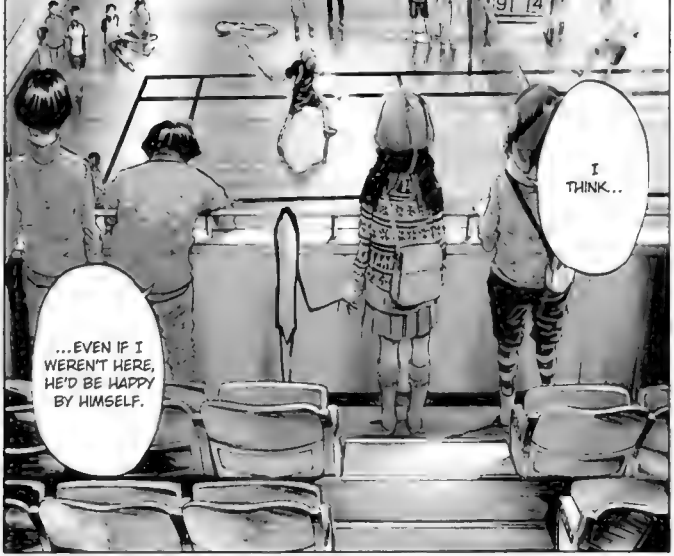
...Pupun thought.

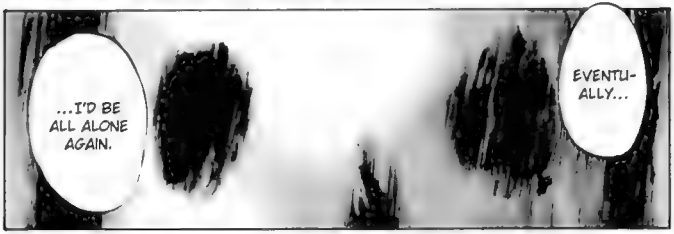
"When I get home, I'm going to cry a lot..."

Sadness filled him.

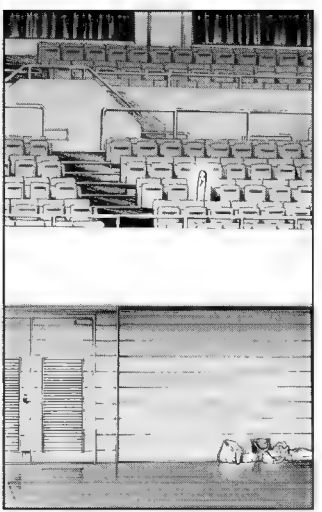


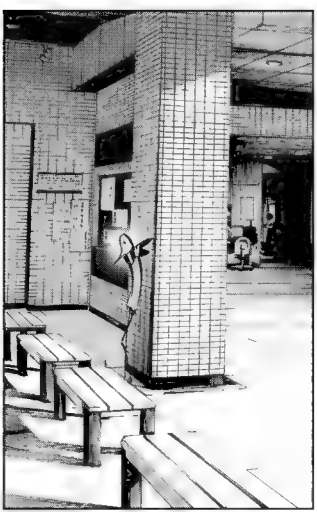
WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT PEOPLE FALLING IN LOVE...
...AND DATING?
I THINK IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A LOVING FAMILY, WANTING MORE LOVE IS JUST GREEDY.
I DON'T WANT THAT.
I WANT SOMEONE TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING AND JUST SEE ME.
...YOU'LL NEVER BE ANYTHING MORE THAN OUTSIDERS TO EACH OTHER.
EVEN IF YOU BECOME BOYFRIEND AND GIRL-FRIEND, NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU LOVE EACH OTHER..
BUT HE HAS LOTS OF PLACES TO RUN AWAY TO.
HE'S KIND, CONSID-ERATE AND COOL.
YAGUCHI IS A REALLY GOOD GUY.


I THINK...
...EVEN IF I WEREN'T HERE, HE'D BE HAPPY BY HIMSELF.

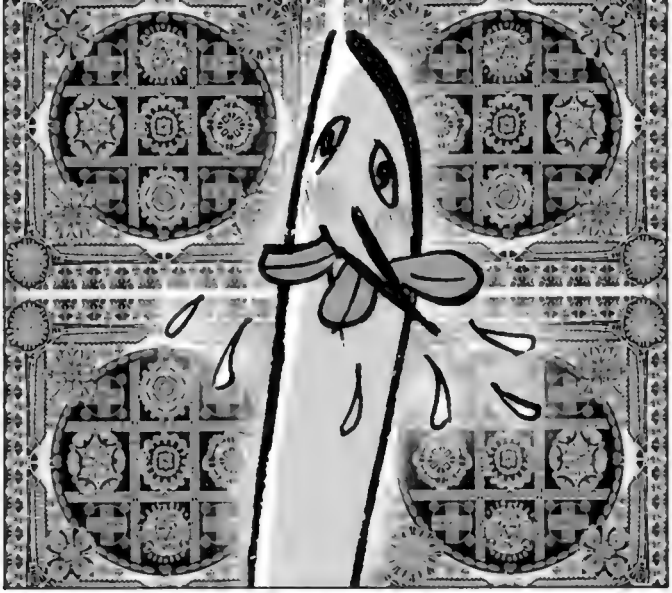

EVENTU-ALLY...
...I'D BE ALL ALONE AGAIN.

DO YOU UNDER-STAND...
...HOW I FEEL, PUNPUN?





EVENTU-
ALLY...
...I'D BE
ALL ALONE
AGAIN.
DO YOU
UNDERSTAND
...
...HOW
I FEEL,
PUNPUN?
...had
inadvertently
caused Punpun
to become...
The
warmth
of Aiko's
hand...
Understand
...?!



...very
excited!

PUNPUN ...
...DO YOU THINK...
...YOU COULD GIVE UP YOUR FAMILY, YOUR DREAMS AND EVERYTHING YOU OWN FOR THE PERSON YOU LOVE?
JUST KIDDING ...
I KNOW YOU CAN'T, PUNPUN. YOU'RE A COWARD.
BUT...
...I KNOW I COULD DO IT. FOR SOMEONE I REALLY LOVE, I COULD DO ANYTHING.
YOU KNOW ...
I HAVE THE SAME DREAM OVER AND OVER.
I DREAM THAT I'M WAITING FOR SOMEONE FOR A LONG TIME.

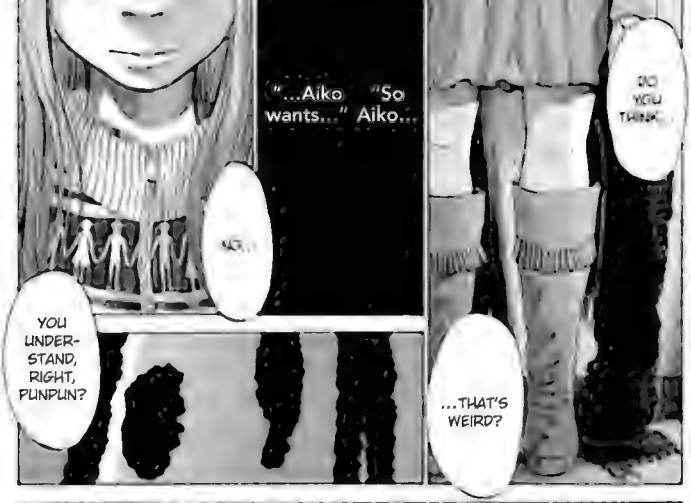
IN THE DARK, ON A BEACH, I'M WAITING FOR SOMEONE...
...FOR YEARS AND DECADES.
BUT THEN, AT SOME POINT, I NOTICE THAT SOMEONE IS STARING AT ME.
IT'S A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, BUT I'M SO HAPPY TO SEE HER THAT I PULL MY FEET OUT OF THE SAND AND RUN OVER TO HER.
BUT WHEN I GET THERE, IT'S JUST MY OWN REFLECTION IN THE WATER.
I GET REALLY SAD...
...AND THEN I WAKE UP.
WHEN I THINK ABOUT HOW WE'RE ALONE LIKE THAT WHEN WE DIE...
...I FEEL VERY DARK.

DO YOU REMEMBER...
...THE ESSAYS WE WROTE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
I WROTE THAT I WANTED TO BE AN ACTRESS, A SINGER OR A MODEL WHEN I GREW UP.
I THINK I WANTED LOTS OF PEOPLE TO KNOW WHO I WAS.
BUT THAT'S NOT TRUE ANYMORE.
NOW I JUST WANT ONE.
I WANT ONE PERSON ...
...WHO KNOWS ME FROM THE TOP OF MY HEAD TO THE TIPS OF MY TOES, WITHOUT A MILLIMETER OF MISUNDERSTANDING.
I WANT THAT PERFECT COMPREHENSION.
I DON'T WANT ANYTHING ELSE...
...IF I CAN JUST BE WITH THAT ONE PERSON.

IF THAT DREAM CAME TRUE...
...I'D BE OKAY DYING RIGHT THEN AND THERE.
OW!
WHAT ?!
THUD

EVEN IF YOU LOSE THIS MATCH, YOU'RE GUARANTEED A SLOT IN THE PREFECTURE TOURNAMENT. BUT IF YOU GET HURT, IT'LL ALL BE FOR NOTHING.
YAGUCHI, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YOU'RE FAVORING YOUR RIGHT LEG. DON'T PUSH YOURSELF IF YOU'RE NOT 100 PERCENT.
WHOA, YAGUCHI IS LOSING HIS LEAD.
KOMATSU
09
14:40
YAGUCHI
NO...
...I'M FINE!
HE CALLED ME YESTER-DAY.
HE SAID HE HAD SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO TELL ME AFTER THE MATCH, SO HE WANTED TO MAKE SURE I CAME.
I WASN'T SURE WHAT WAS GOING ON, BUT I DIDN'T LIKE HOW HE WAS GETTING ALL WORKED UP.

SO I SAID TO HIM...
"YOU DON'T NEED TO GO TO THE GAME...
"JUST RUN AWAY WITH ME."
HE LAUGHED AND SAID, "WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?"
AIKO, WHAT ARE YOU MUTTERING ABOUT OVER THERE...?
PAY ATTENTION— THIS IS A GREAT MATCH!
THAT'S WHEN I FINALLY KNEW...
WE LIVE...
...IN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WORLDS.
"So Aiko...



"...waiting for someone to come get her?"

"Is she still...

"...with her bag slung over her shoulder, full of things for Kagoshima...

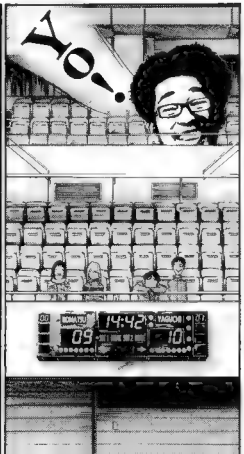
"That day in front of town hall...

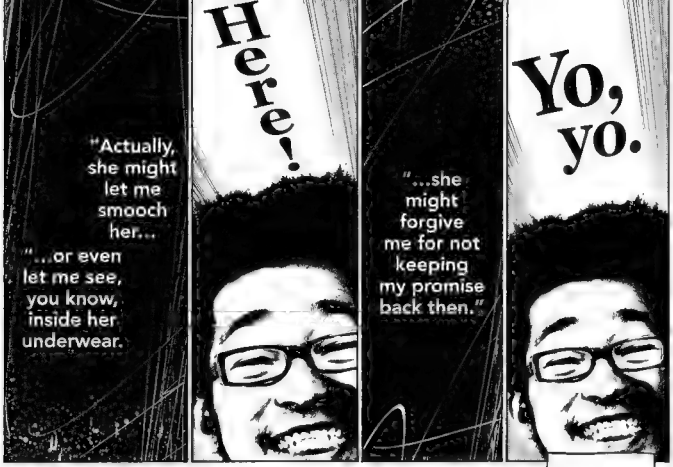
That's the chant that makes God appear.

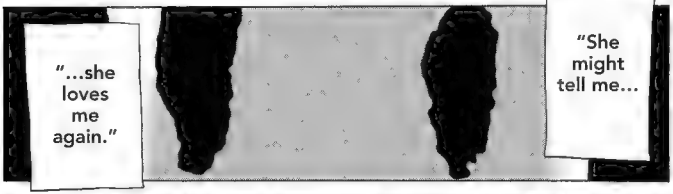
Dear God, dear God, tinkle hoy...

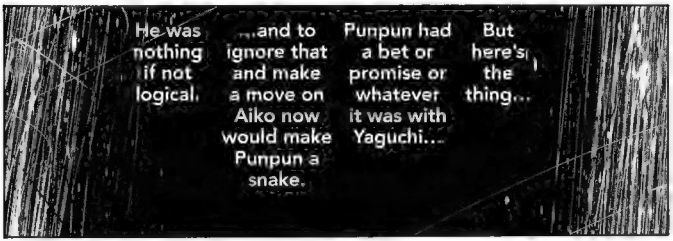
"If I squeeze Aiko's hand right now..."

But there was no need to chant it anymore. Now he just turned up.



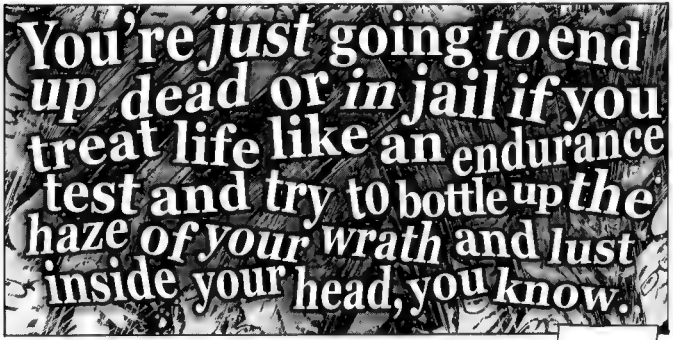

"Actually, she might let me smooch her...
"...or even let me see, you know, inside her underwear.
Here!
"...she might forgive me for not keeping my promise back then."
Yo, yo.


"...she loves me again."
"She might tell me...

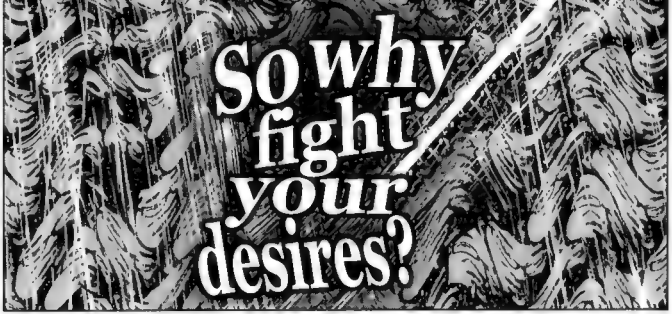

He was nothing if not logical.
...and to ignore that and make a move on Aiko now would make Punpun a snake.
Punpun had a bet or promise or whatever it was with Yaguchi...
But here's the thing...

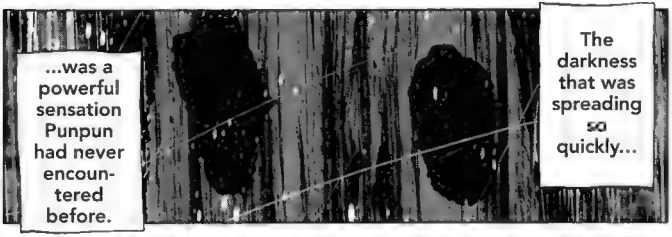
Hey Punpun, maybe it's time to stop playing at being a good person?

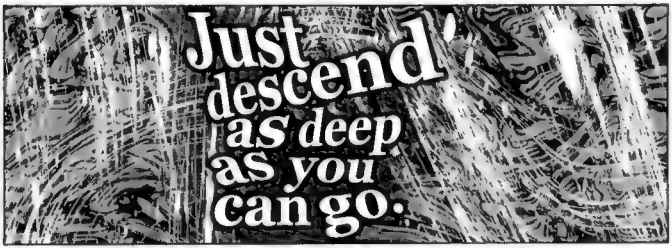
...he may be right.
Yes...


You're just going to end up dead or in jail if you treat life like an endurance test and try to bottle up the haze of your wrath and lust inside your head, you know.

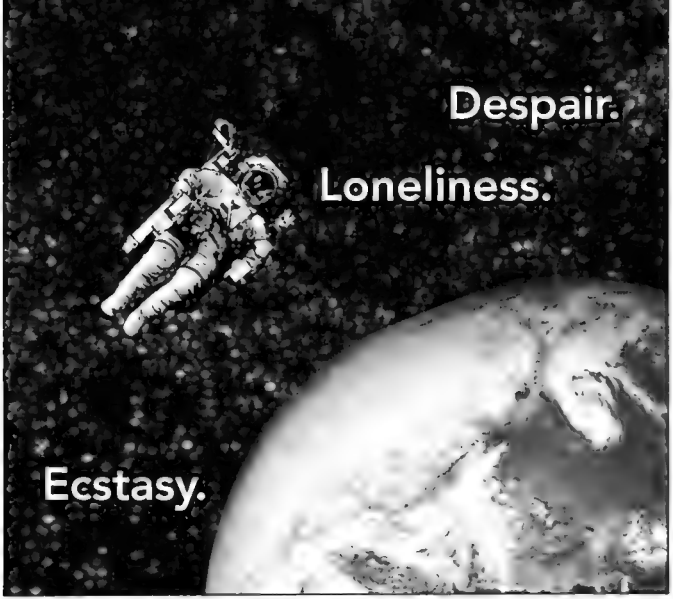
...something dark and heavy in his heart...
Punpun felt...

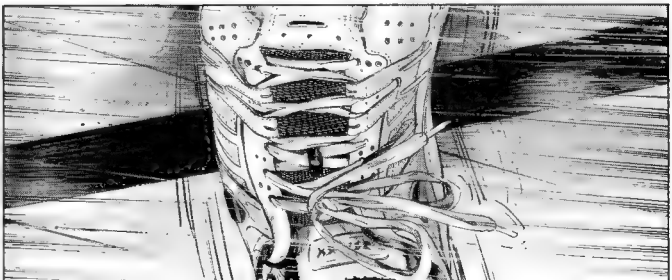

So why fight your desires?


...was a powerful sensation Punpun had never encountered before.
The darkness that was spreading so quickly...

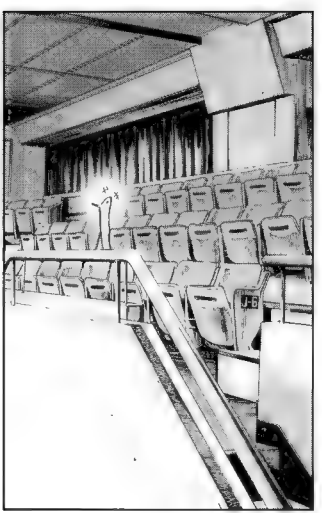

Just descend as deep as you can go.

...he was floating aimlessly in space.
It felt like...


Despair.
Loneliness.
Ecstasy.



DID YOU...
...JUST HEAR SOME-THING FUNNY?
14:45
YAGUCHI
SET1 BREAK SET2
OH ...
...HE FELL.



HEY, PUNPUN!
LET'S GO SEE WHAT HAPPENED! HURRY UP!

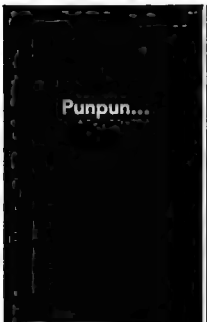
CHRONIC INFLAMMATION OF THE ACHILLES TENDON...?
WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?
NO WONDER HE WAS FAVORING HIS RIGHT LEG.

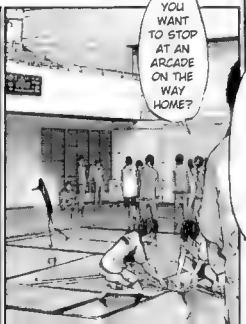
YOU MUST HAVE PUT SUDDEN STRESS ON YOUR LEFT SIDE.
YAGUCHI IS DONE.
HE HAD NO REASON TO PUSH SO HARD TO WIN THIS MATCH.
THERE WAS STILL THE PREFECTURE TOURNAMENT...
IF YOUR TENDON IS SEVERED, YOU'RE LOOKING AT A MINIMUM OF TWO MONTHS IN A CAST.
YOU DID A GREAT JOB, MAMORU!
I'M SO PROUD OF YOU.

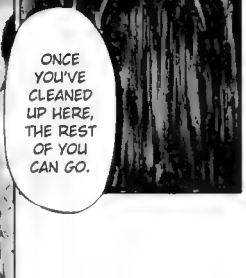
DON'T TOUCH ME!
ONODERA.
I...
...I LOST.
HA HA.

...WIN.
YOU...

I'LL GO WITH YAGUCHI TO THE HOSPITAL.


Punpun...


YOU WANT TO STOP AT AN ARCADE ON THE WAY HOME?


ONCE YOU'VE CLEANED UP HERE, THE REST OF YOU CAN GO.

It was too much for Punpun.

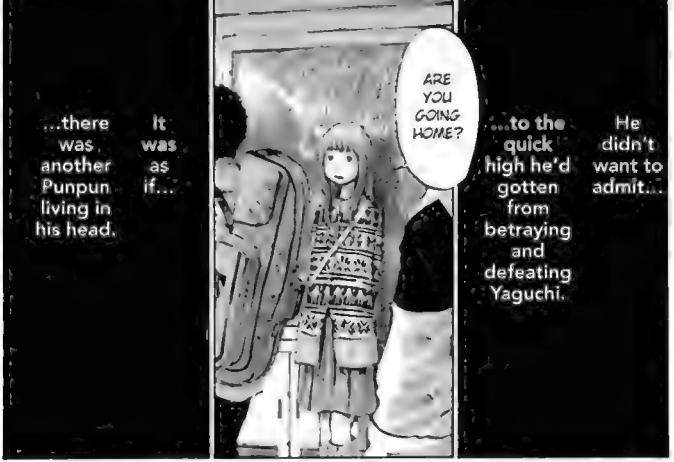
...he felt like he had robbed Yaguchi of something precious.

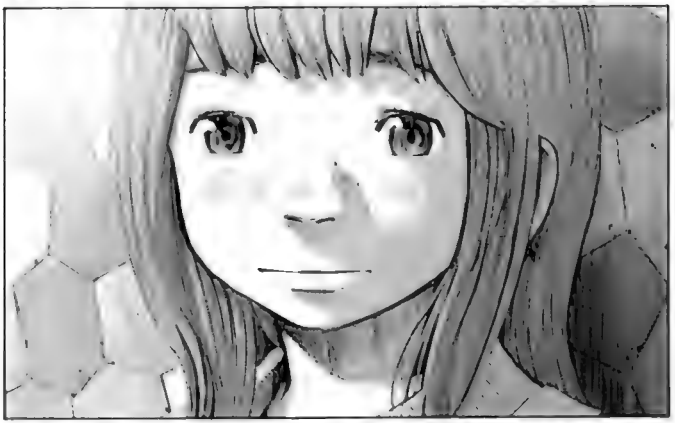
In fact...

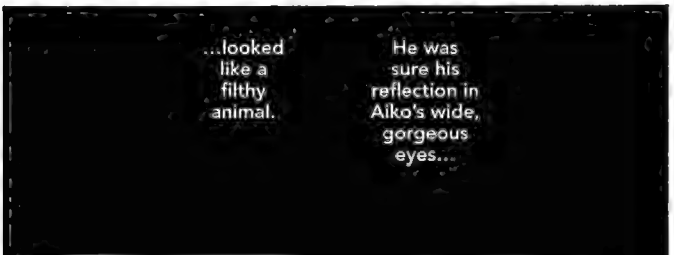
Punpun was a sly one.

Pretending to be a good person, even inside his own head...

No, that's not true.

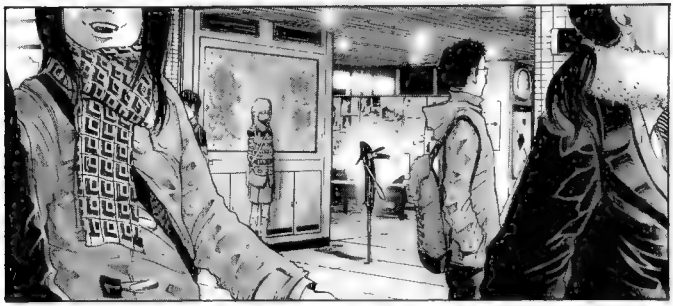

...there was another Punpun living in his head.
It was as if...
ARE YOU GOING HOME?
...to the quick high he'd gotten from betraying and defeating Yaguchi.
He didn't want to admit...




...looked like a filthy animal.
He was sure his reflection in Aiko's wide, gorgeous eyes...

"...to go to Kagoshima with you that day."

"I'm really sorry I couldn't keep my promise...

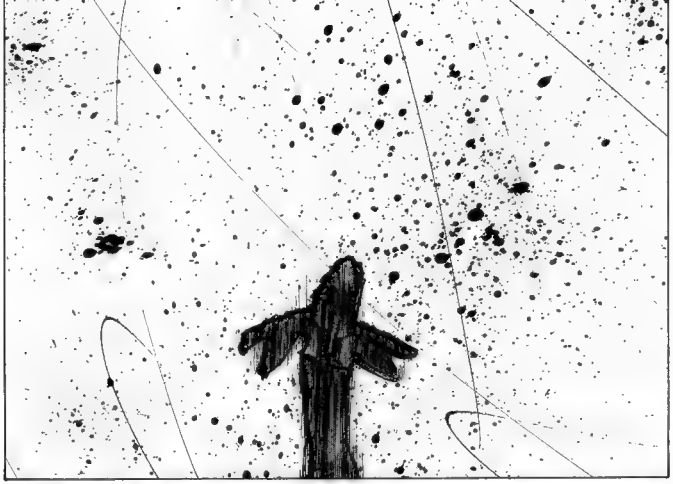


...that he had wanted to say that for two years.

Punpun finally understood...

"Aiko is smiling."

SO...
...LET'S GO NOW.
TO KAGOSHIMA!



Punpun was...

...he would plummet...

...into an abysmal darkness and never stop falling.

...YOU DON'T LIE, RIGHT?

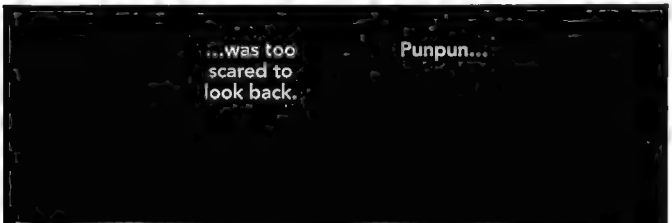
PUNPUN...

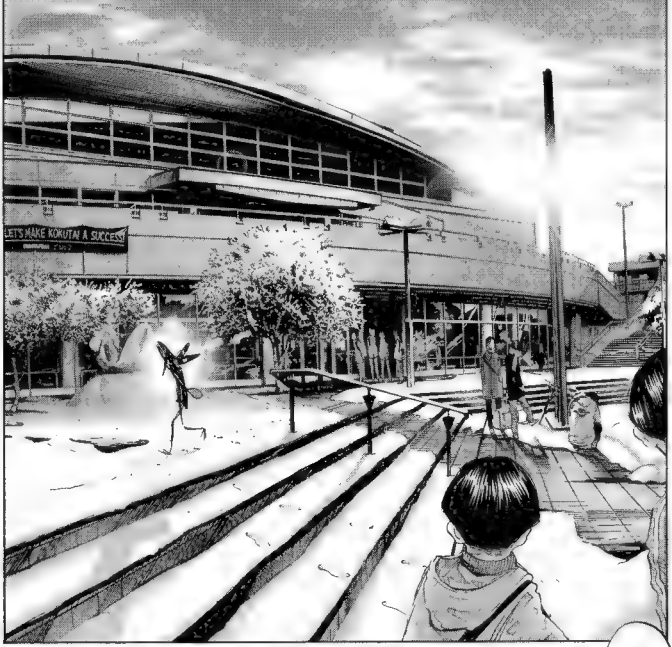
If he took even one step towards Aiko...

How could he explain it?

So Punpun strained to say...
WHY?
"Go see Yaguchi."
"Yaguchi needs you right now."
WHY?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
I DON'T GET IT.


...was too scared to look back.
Punpun...



For now...

...the one thing that was clear to Punpun...

...was how last night's snow was a backdrop...

...to highlight how dirty he'd become.

If only...

...everything could melt into this clean white snow...

...and disappear.

PUNPUN.

BESTIALITY OR NECROPHILIA, WHICH WOULD YOU RATHER DO?

You're crying.
Gonna cry again?
"I'm not!"

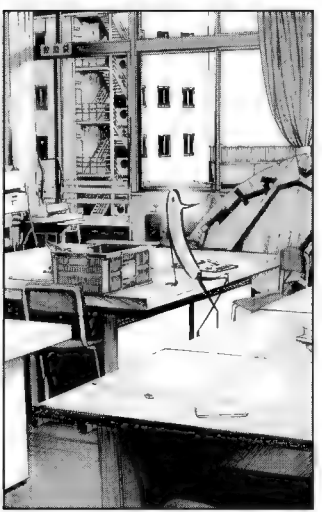
GOODNIGHT PUNPUN

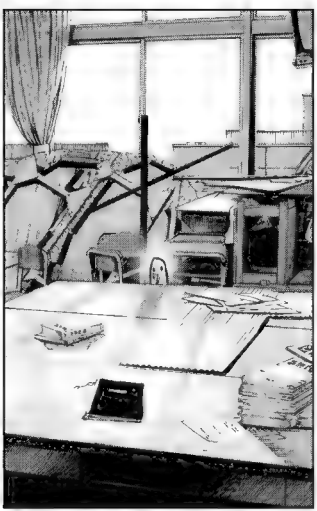
Part Four

INIO ASANO

"I'm not crying!"

"Good-bye, Aiko."

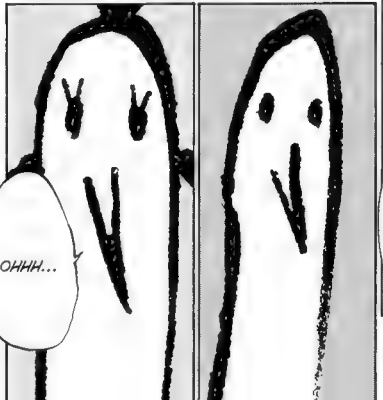




UMM...
I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO...
WELL, A LOT'S HAPPENED AND SHE'S MY GIRL-FRIEND NOW...

I USED TO BE A NURSE.

UH, UMM... MY NAME IS MIDORI OKUMA.
NICE TO MEET YOU. WELL, IT'S NOT REALLY THE FIRST TIME... DO YOU REMEMBER ME?


OHHH...

OH, NO WAY... AWESOME ...!
THERE'S NO WAY I'D FORGET YOU!
SHE'S SUCH A NICE GIRL!
HYA HA HA!
IF I WERE A MAN, I'D BEND HER OVER AND SLIP IT TO HER GOOD!
I'M SORRY ABOUT MY SISTER. SHE'S—
FULL OF LIFE!
YUICHI ...
YOU DID WELL FOR A BALDY.
WELL, HOW ABOUT IT? WANT THE HOUSE TO YOURSELVES TONIGHT?
SHUT UP. YOU'RE SO TACKY.
PEW
PEW
PEW
HYA HA HA HA.
I'M FEELING REALLY GOOD TODAY!

MIDORI, YOU LIVE WITH YOUR FOLKS, RIGHT...?
WHY DON'T YOU JUST MOVE IN HERE?
AND THEN WHEN I'M A SENILE OLD LADY, YOU CAN WIPE MY ASS FOR ME!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? YOU'RE STILL IN YOUR THIRTIES.
AAAAGH!
I'M FEELING SUPER WONDER-FUL!
UM... I'M MIDORI OKUMA.
NICE TO MEET YOU.
UH HUH

PEW PEW PEW PEW PEW PEW

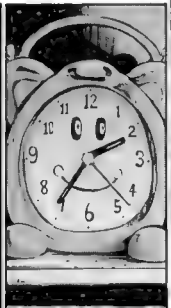
WOW...
YOU KNOW...
I KNOW HE'S ONLY YOUR NEPHEW, BUT IF YOU LOOK CLOSELY, HE LOOKS *A LOT* LIKE YOU, YUICHI.

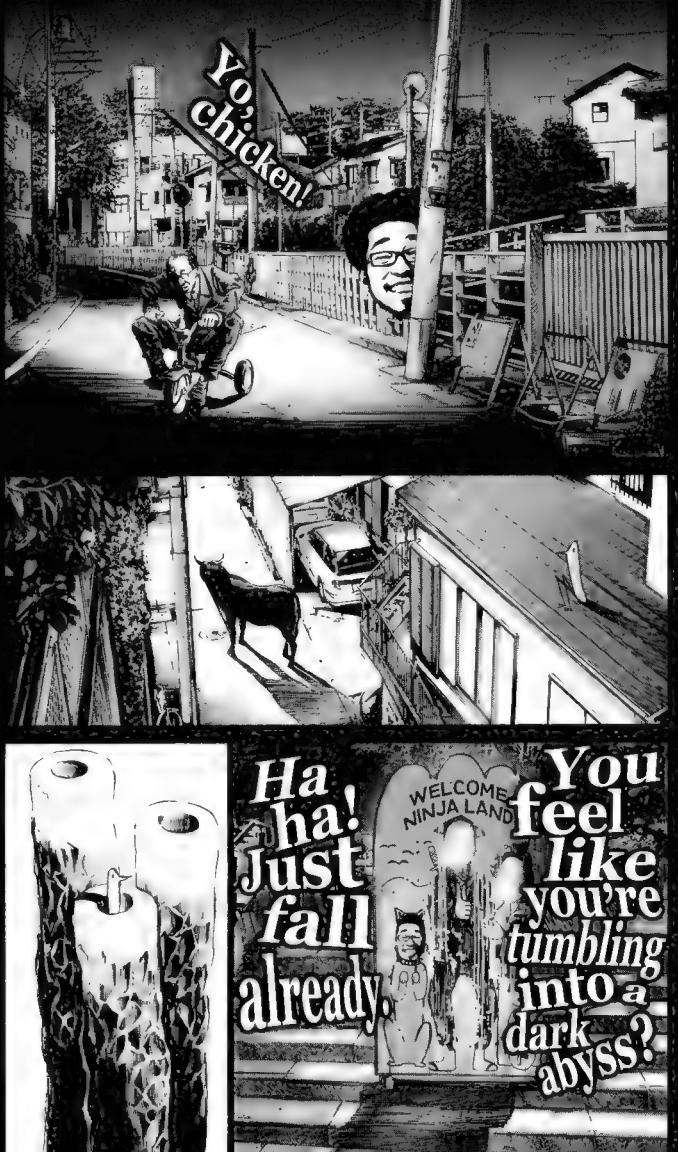
PEW
PEW
YEAH, EVEN DOWN TO BEING A LITTLE SHY.
HUH?
DON'T YOU MEAN *DE-PRESSED*?!
Punpun...

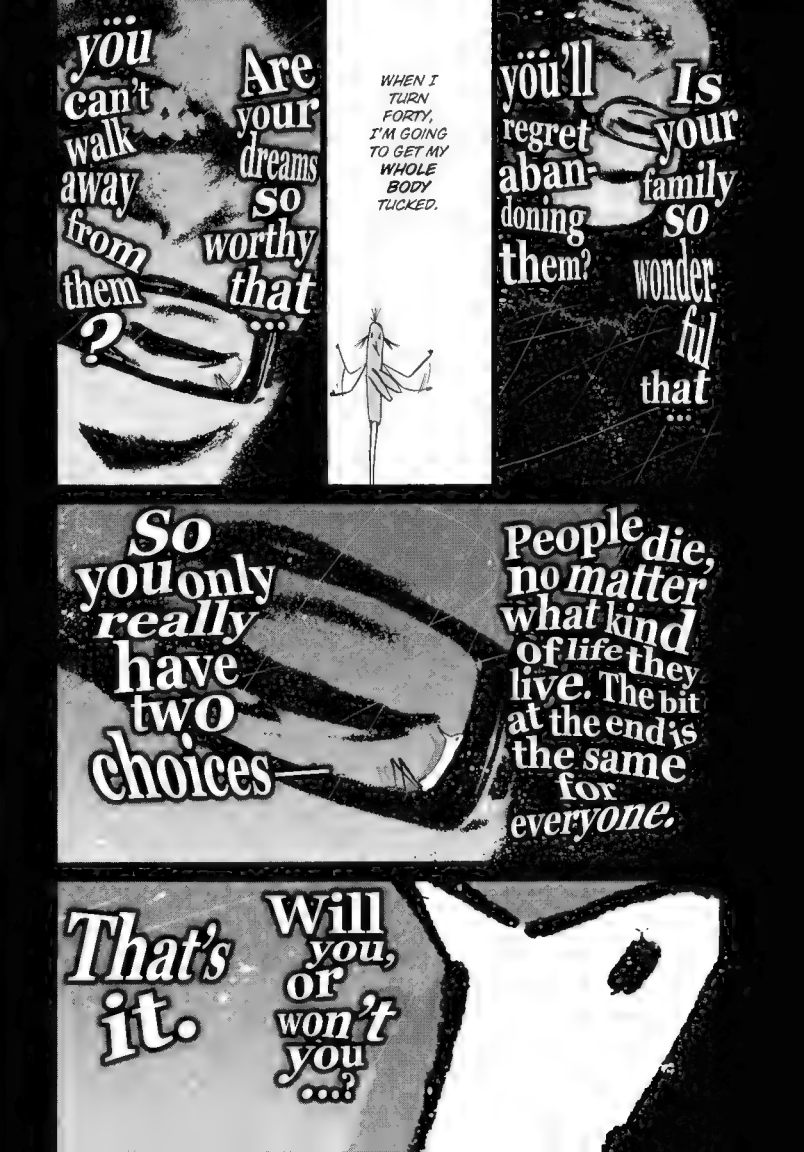
...had been feeling odd the last few days.

...every night he'd had the same dream.

Ever since the tourna-



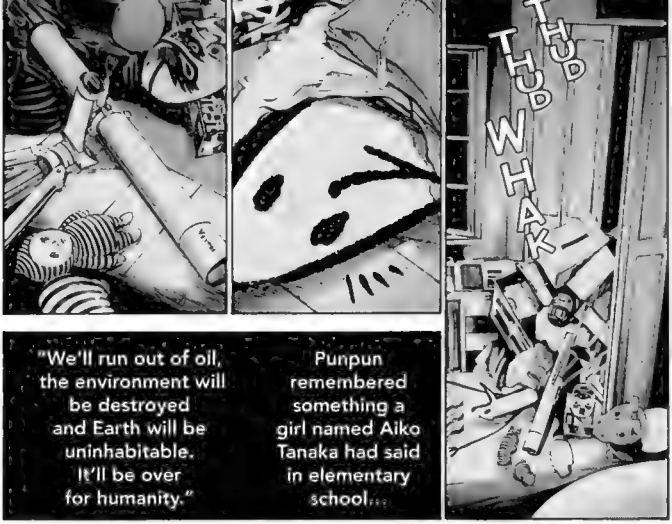

Yo, chicken!
You feel like you're tumbling into a dark abyss?
WELCOME NINJA LAND
Ha ha! Just fall already.


...you can't walk away from them?
Are your dreams so worthy that...
WHEN I TURN FORTY, I'M GOING TO GET MY WHOLE BODY TUCKED.
...you'll regret abandoning them?
Is your family so wonderful that...
So you only really have two choices—
People die, no matter what kind of life they live. The bit at the end is the same for everyone.
That's it.
Will you, or won't you...?

He suspected it would be better if everyone in the world just forgot about him.

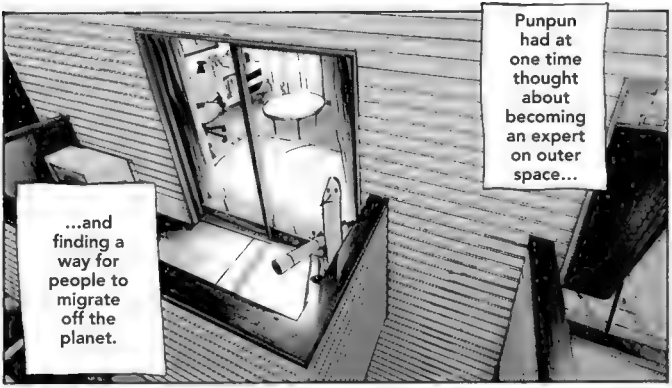
He didn't want to talk to anyone.

He didn't want to hurt anyone.

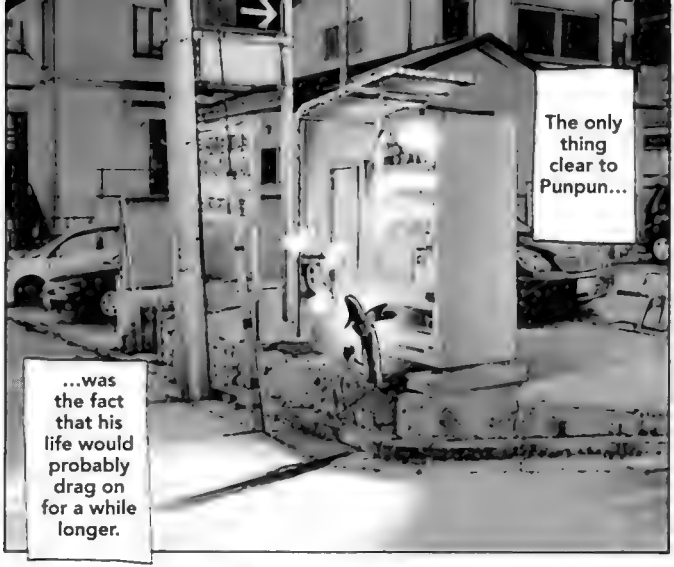


"We'll run out of oil, the environment will be destroyed and Earth will be uninhabitable. It'll be over for humanity."

Punpun remembered something a girl named Aiko Tanaka had said in elementary school...


Punpun had at one time thought about becoming an expert on outer space...
...and finding a way for people to migrate off the planet.

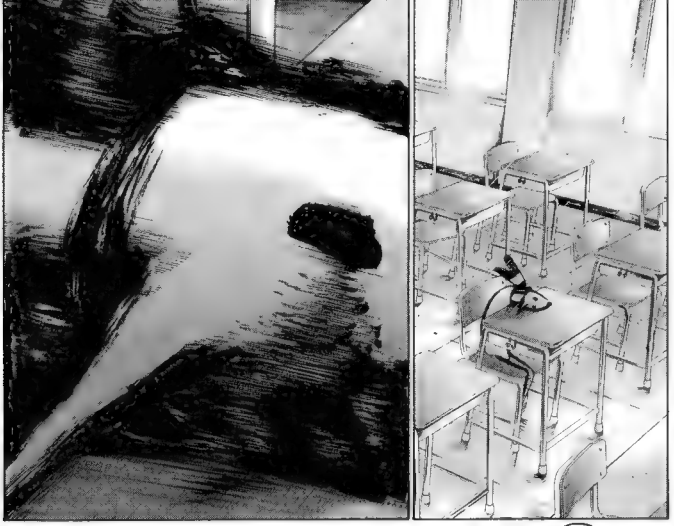
When Punpun was little, it seemed like he'd be able to touch the stars if he just reached out his hand...
...but now...
...they were terribly distant and wouldn't even look at him.
W-WAIT, YUICHI ...
...THAT'S NOT WHY I CAME OVER.
IT DOESN'T MATTER.
I'M A MAN AT MY SEXUAL PEAK!
BUT THEY'LL HEAR US! THE SLIDING DOOR IS REALLY FLIMSY.
DON'T WORRY— THEY'RE BOTH ASLEEP.
OH..
... YES ...
Humanity might be done for...
...but maybe not.
ASLEEP.


The only thing clear to Punpun...
...was the fact that his life would probably drag on for a while longer.

PUNPUN!

REMEMBER WE WERE TALKING ABOUT GOING AWAY OVER SPRING BREAK...?
WE DECIDED ON SHIBUYA, LIKE THE GIRLS SUGGESTED
YOU'RE COMING, RIGHT, PUNPUN?

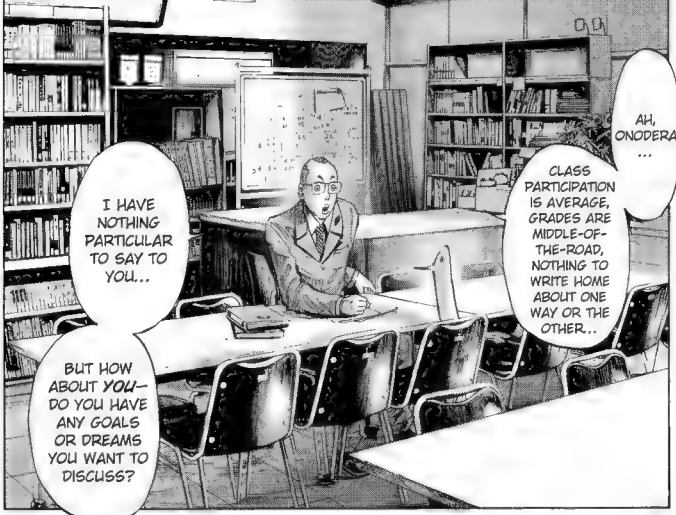
HUH ...?
HEY, PUNPUN.
HE'S ASLEEP.
I GUESS IT DOESN'T MATTER ...
PUNPUN ISN'T REALLY HANGING OUT WITH US THESE DAYS ANYWAY.
EVEN IF HE CAME WITH US, HE WOULDN'T BE ANY FUN.
HMM...
... MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.
BUT IF HE'S TRYING TO GHOST ON US, HE'S AN ASS-HOLE.
AH HA HA HA.



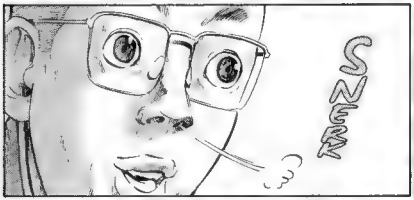
HEY, SEKI.
SOCIAL STUDIES REFERENCE ROOM
IT'S ONLY THE THIRD TERM OF YOUR FIRST YEAR. NO NEED TO BE IN SUCH A HURRY.
AND I KEEP TELLING YOU...
...I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO INTEREST IN GOING TO HIGH SCHOOL.
NEVER MIND, DO WHAT YOU WANT.
THAT'S JUST THE WRONG KIND OF ENVIRONMENT FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME, DON'T YOU THINK?

HAVE YOU DECIDED ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL?
SHIMIZU, WHAT ABOUT YOU?
SORRY I KEPT YOU WAITING, SHIMIZU...
FIRST YEAR STUDENT-TEACHER MEETINGS
CLASS 4 ... LIBRARY
CLASS 5 ... GUIDANCE OFFICE
CLASS 6 ... SOCIAL STUDIES REFERENCE ROOM
IT TOOK A LITTLE LONGER THAN I THOUGHT.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO TOLD ME TO STUDY HARD...
...AND GET INTO THE BEST SCHOOL I COULD.
OH YEAH.
THAT'S RIGHT.
NORMAL'S BEST FOR YOU.

YO, PUNPUN...
IT'S BEEN AGES. DO YOU HAVE YOUR MEETING TODAY TOO?
LATER.
HA HA.
ARE YOU GETTING PUBES ...?
IT'S BEEN SO LONG. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
HOW ARE YOU? WOW, YOUR VOICE HAS GOTTEN DEEPER.
Like a jungle..


AH, ONODERA ...
CLASS PARTICIPATION IS AVERAGE, GRADES ARE MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD, NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT ONE WAY OR THE OTHER...
I HAVE NOTHING PARTICULAR TO SAY TO YOU...
BUT HOW ABOUT *YOU*— DO YOU HAVE ANY GOALS OR DREAMS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS?

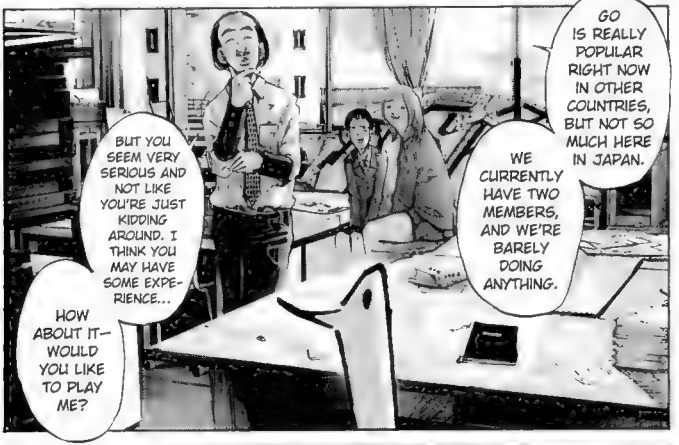
Punpun thought super hard...


SNEEZ

HEE HEE HEE

"I want to save the world by becoming an expert on outer space."
...but nothing came to mind, so he said...

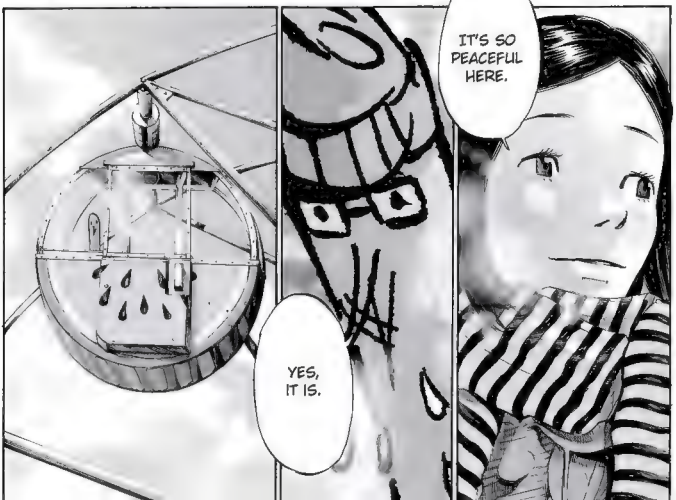
AND I SEE YOU'RE QUITTING BADMINTON?
HAVE YOU DECIDED ON A NEW ACTIVITY?
GO CLUB
Come experience the universe that plays out on the board...?!
Come too
WELL, OKAY.
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO STUDY RIDICULOUSLY HARD FROM NOW ON.


GO IS REALLY POPULAR RIGHT NOW IN OTHER COUNTRIES, BUT NOT SO MUCH HERE IN JAPAN.
WE CURRENTLY HAVE TWO MEMBERS, AND WE'RE BARELY DOING ANYTHING.
BUT YOU SEEM VERY SERIOUS AND NOT LIKE YOU'RE JUST KIDDING AROUND. I THINK YOU MAY HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE...
HOW ABOUT IT— WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY ME?

The towering vault of the February sky...
...was a little too cold for Punpun.

For now, all he could do...
...was wish for this winter to be over.

GOOD ONE!
THWAK

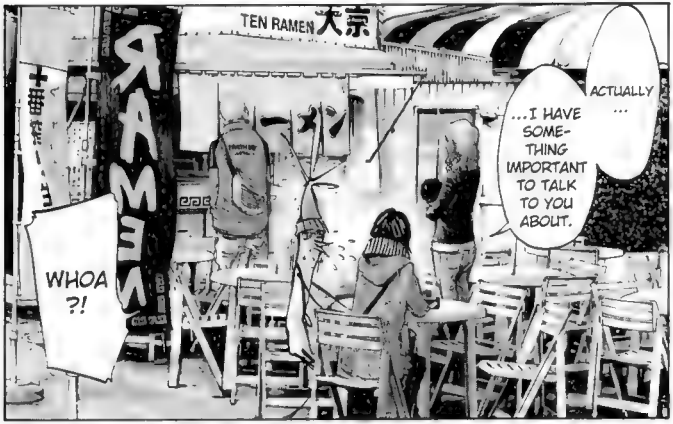

IT'S SO PEACEFUL HERE.
YES, IT IS.

BUT YOU KNOW ...
...BEING SO EXCES-SIVELY HAPPY...
The weather at the amusement park his uncle and Midori had brought him to was very nice.
The complete opposite of how Punpun was feeling.

HEY, HEY, MIDORI...
...WAS MY PESSIMISM CONTAGIOUS?
MAKES YOU WONDER HOW LONG THE GOOD DAYS WILL LAST.
...MAKES YOU INSECURE ...

...SO MAYBE WE'RE MEANT TO GO ALL OUT AND ENJOY IT WHILE WE CAN.
TRUE HAPPINESS IS A FLEETING THING...

YEAH ...
...YOU'RE RIGHT.
WOW, YOU DIDN'T TAKE MUCH CONVINC-ING!


TEN RAMEN 大京
ラーメン
RAMEN
ACTUALLY ...
...I HAVE SOME-THING IMPORTANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
WHOA ?!

OH...
YEAH?
OKAY ...
...SO?

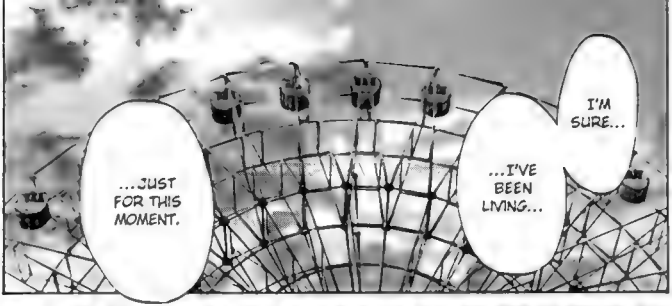
THE OWNER OF THE CAFÉ...
HIS MOM'S NOT DOING WELL, SO HE DECIDED TO MOVE HOME TO TAKE CARE OF HER.

HE COULDN'T DECIDE WHETHER TO SELL THE CAFÉ OR RENT IT, SO I JUST BLURTED OUT...

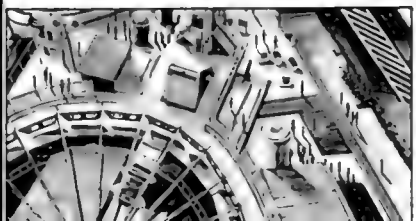
"WOULD YOU RENT IT TO ME?"
I STILL NEED THINGS LIKE A FOOD-HANDLING CERTIFICATION AND START-UP MONEY, SO I'M NOWHERE NEAR READY...
...BUT IF HE'LL RENT IT TO ME AS IS, I CAN SAVE MONEY ON DECOR.
I KNOW YOU WEREN'T SURE IF YOU WANTED TO GO BACK TO THE POTTERY SCHOOL ANYWAY, BUT...
...WHAT IF YOU TEACH AND MAKE YOUR OWN PIECES TOO...
...AND THEN I CAN USE THEM IN MY CAFÉ...?
I THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE NICE.
IT'S BEEN A FANTASY OF MINE.
AND THE OWNER SAID HE'S OKAY WITH THE IDEA...
...AND HE'LL CUT ME A DEAL ON THE RENT TOO.

MIDORI
...
...YOU'RE SO POWERFUL.
I MEAN, LOOK AT YOU...
...MAKING YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE.

...BUT JUST HAVING YOU AROUND MADE ME HANG IN THERE.
MIDORI!
NO WAY...
I COULDN'T HAVE DONE THIS BY MYSELF.
TO BE HONEST, YUICHI, YOU'RE NOT VERY RELIABLE ...

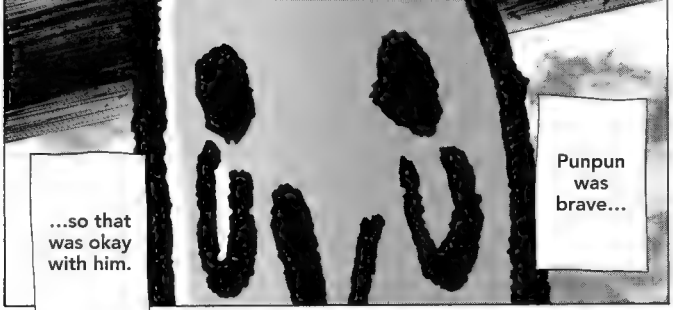


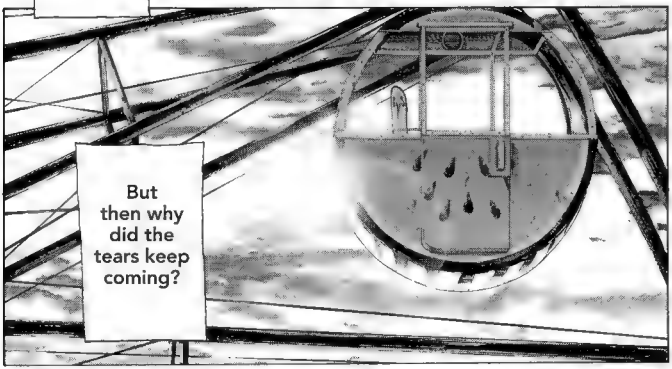
The people, so far below the Ferris wheel...
...were like little ants.
When he thought about how each little dot was a life...
...Punpun was over-whelmed.
LET'S MAKE A PROMISE.

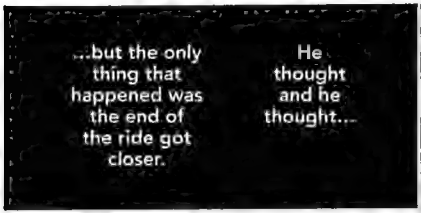


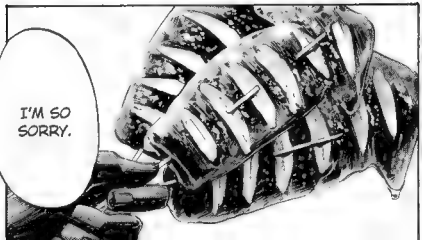
WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL FOR BOTH OF US...
...LET'S GET MARRIED.

...Punpun was just a piece of lint or something else too insignificant to notice.
And to those looking up at him...
...ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU SAID TO YOUR EX-GIRL-FRIEND?
OH..
... HEY ...
IT'S REAL ...
...THIS TIME.


Punpun was brave...
...so that was okay with him.


But then why did the tears keep coming?

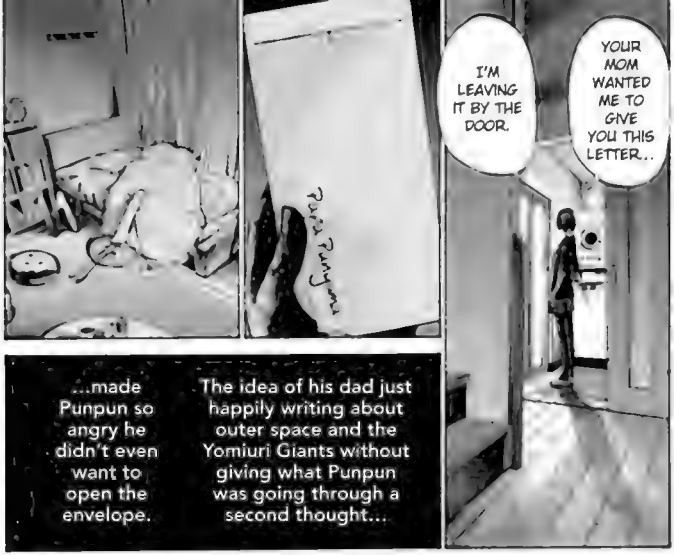

...but the only thing that happened was the end of the ride got closer.
He thought and he thought...


I'M SO SORRY.

I'M REALLY SORRY!
WE'RE THE ONES WHO SUGGESTED SPLITTING UP, AND THEN WE WERE LATE MEETING YOU...
HE DRANK TOO MUCH AND GOT SICK.
WHOA, DUDE! THREE SQUID ON A STICK, JUST FOR YOU?
YOU'RE WILD, MAN!

SIGH... AMUSEMENT PARK...?
YOU SHOULD HAVE ASKED ME— I WOULD'VE TOTALLY DITCHED WORK.
BUT IT WAS FULL OF COUPLES.
PHEH, DIE!
I THOUGHT SO.
OH, YUICHI FELL ASLEEP.
SO, MIDORI, HOW ABOUT TONIGHT ...?
YOU WANNA DRINK THE NIGHT AWAY AND GIRL TALK?
I DON'T KNOW, I ALREADY SPEND SO MUCH TIME HERE.
SO WHAT? I TOLD YOU, I DON'T MIND.
YOU'RE A GREAT COOK, SO JUST MOVE IN, WHY DON'T YOU?!
WELL THEN, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FOR DINNER TOMORROW? I'LL MAKE WHATEVER YOU WANT.
OH, IN THAT CASE, MAYBE I'LL LEAVE WORK A LITTLE EARLY AND PICK UP SOME GROCERIES ON THE WAY HOME.

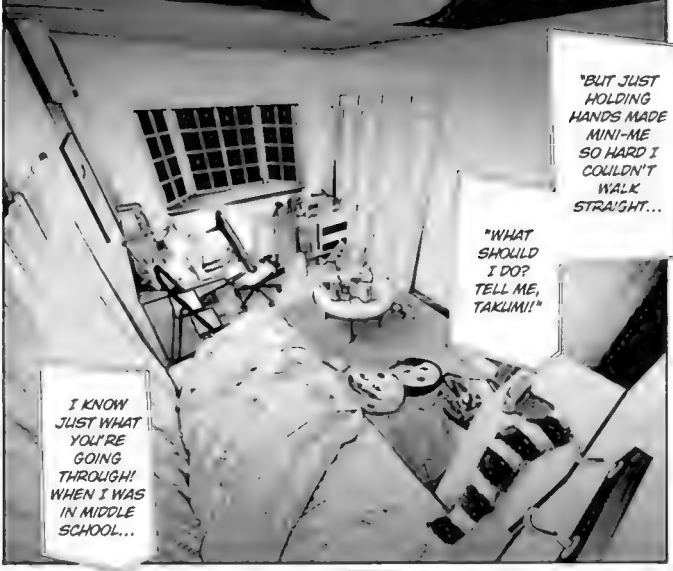
OH ...
WHAT IS THIS?
WHAT'S THIS LIKE?
IT'S LIKE A FAMILY!
KYA HA HA HA
...and he wasn't interested in it at all.
...thought playing family was stupid...
Punpun...
AHA HA HA HA, THIS IS SO MUCH FUN.
YOU SAY THAT A LOT THESE DAYS.
PUNPUN ...
...I HAD FUN TODAY.



...made Punpun so angry he didn't even want to open the envelope.

The idea of his dad just happily writing about outer space and the Yomiuri Giants without giving what Punpun was going through a second thought...

"I'M IN MY SECOND YEAR OF MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND I FINALLY HAVE A GIRLFRIEND. I SUCCEEDED IN HOLDING HER HAND ON OUR LAST DATE.
SO. OUR NEXT LETTER IS FROM SNAKEMAN.


"BUT JUST HOLDING HANDS MADE MINI-ME SO HARD I COULDN'T WALK STRAIGHT...
"WHAT SHOULD I DO? TELL ME, TAKUMI!"
I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH! WHEN I WAS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL...

"I'M A STRUGGLING STUDENT FROM OSAKA WHO JUST FOUND OUT I DIDN'T GET INTO UNIVERSITY THIS YEAR. MY PARENTS KEEP HOUNDING ME TO GO TO A GOOD SCHOOL.
"I JUST HAVE ONE LIFE—HOW IMPORTANT IS STUDYING? TELL ME, TAKUMI!"
Punpun was studying hard these days.
No particular reason. It was calming.
Punpun was going to study hard and get into the Tokyo University science department...
...and then he'd join an underground organization devoted to studying nuclear power...

Hello, I'm a boy in the first year of middle school.

My parent are divorced because my dad was abusive, and my mom is an alcoholic.

In the dead of night, I can hear my uncle and his girlfriend doing it.

I have no dreams. I have no girlfriend.

What's the best way for me to go on?

—Distressed Angel ☆ Pie

Punpun was truly saddened that God couldn't come up with something sensitive to say.

You're the one who calls me God.

Hey, what are you implying?!

...who are you?

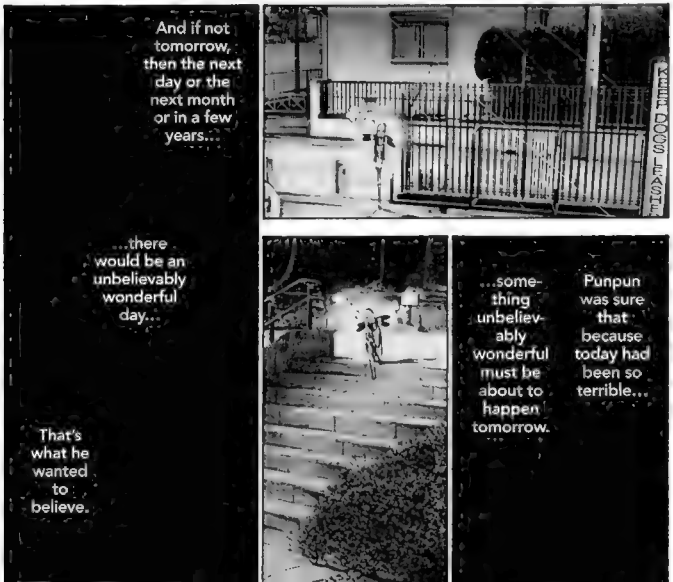
Then...

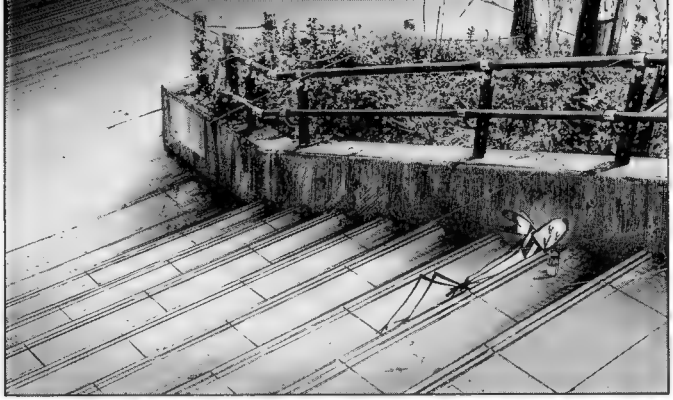
"I HEARD BOYS JERK OFF THINKING ABOUT THE GIRLS THEY LIKE.
Hee hee hee
THIS ONE IS FROM TOMATO PRINCESS OF HOKURIKU.
SO, ON TO THE NEXT LETTER.
"WHY DO BOYS DO THINGS LIKE THAT?! TELL ME, TAKUMI!"
"I CAN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF SOMEONE DOING THAT TO ME! THAT IS SO DISGUSTING.

...a bitter wind was blowing through the night-drenched neighborhood.

Even though it was almost spring...

Spring would definitely arrive soon.
There was no such thing as endless winter.


And if not tomorrow, then the next day or the next month or in a few years...
...there would be an unbelievably wonderful day...
That's what he wanted to believe.
THREE DOGS LEKSTE
...something unbelievably wonderful must be about to happen tomorrow.
Punpun was sure that because today had been so terrible...



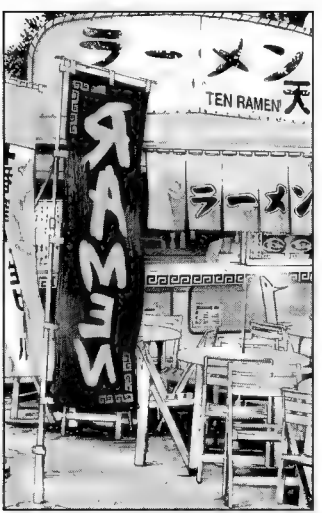
But to whom?

It was like a prayer...

Goodnight, Punpun.

...Just go to sleep.

For now...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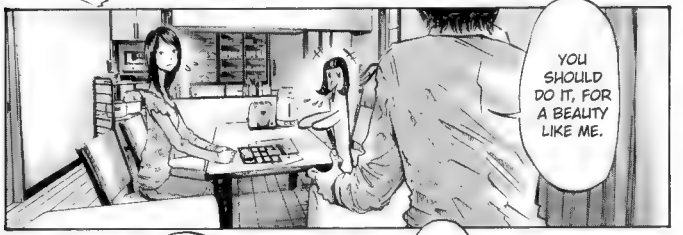
W-WHOA...!
WOW-WEE!...!
YOU GOT ME, MA'AM.
IF I GIVE YOU ANY MORE OF A DISCOUNT, MY MANAGER WILL KILL ME!
HE MAKES US STUFF MAILBOXES ON OUR DAYS OFF, YOU KNOW.


YOU SHOULD DO IT, FOR A BEAUTY LIKE ME.

OH, HELLO, SIR...?
THIS IS KUME.
IT'S A DETACHED THREE BEDROOM PLUS PACKING.
YES, HOW FAR CAN WE COME DOWN?
Kihachiro Kume
Estimator, Southern District
Lucky Luge Moving Company Limited

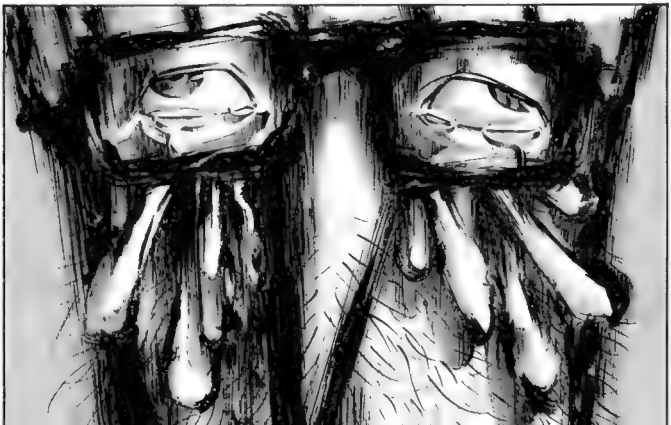
Two years later
MA'AM ...
I DID IT!
HOW ABOUT $1,300, FURNITURE PADS INCLUDED.
KEEP GOING LIKE THAT UNTIL YOU GET DOWN TO $1,000!
W-WHAT ...?!
WHOA!
MAMA ONODERA
PUNPUN YUICHI
MIDORI OKUMA

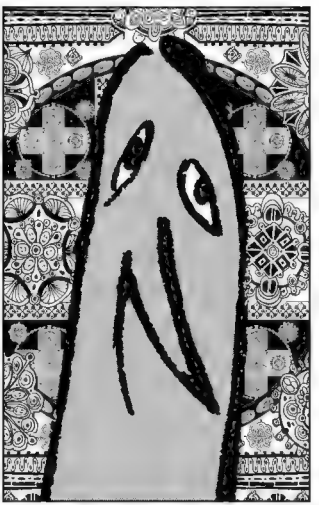
I DON'T MIND AT ALL...!
I'M GETTING BORED HERE, AND THERE'S NO REASON TO STAY IN THIS HOUSE.
AND...
...YOU'RE SURE IT'S OKAY?
I'LL STILL HAVE A TIDY SUM LEFT OVER FROM THE SALE EVEN AFTER I PAY OUT THE MORTGAGE.
COVERING YUICHI'S LITTLE PROBLEM WILL BE A BREEZE.
YUICHI IS SO STUBBORN ...
I DON'T THINK HE WAS VERY HAPPY ABOUT IT.
IDIOT ...
HE PAID RENT FOR THE WHOLE FIVE YEARS HE LIVED HERE...
SO IF YOU ADD THAT UP, WE'RE EVEN...
HE'S SO HARD-HEADED.

WELL...
...ONCE YOU GET GOING, YOU DON'T BACK DOWN EITHER.
LIKE I SAID...
...I'D ALREADY DECIDED TO SELL THE HOUSE.
OH..
...I WONDER HOW PUNPUN'S HIGH SCHOOL ENTRANCE EXAM WENT?
WAS THAT TODAY ...?
WELL, HE'S ALREADY GOTTEN INTO HIS SAFETY SCHOOL, SO I'M SURE IT'S FINE.
HE WORKED SO HARD...
ALL HE DID WAS STUDY THESE PAST TWO YEARS.
SO MAYBE MY EDUCATION POLICY WASN'T TOTALLY WRONG ...
AHA HA HA.
SIGH.
HEY, MIDORI...
IT'S ONLY BEEN A WEEK SINCE YUICHI STOPPED COMING HOME.

I KNOW THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN YUICHI AND A PIECE OF SHIT, BUT...
HE'S A GROWN MAN.
...YOU WORRY TOO MUCH.
I'M SURE HE'S JUST STAYING WITH FRIENDS.
I DON'T THINK ...
...HE HAS ANY FRIENDS LEFT.
YOU HAVE A POINT.
I DON'T THINK...
...YUICHI HAS ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO.
WELL...
...MY GUESS IS...

...HELL.
BO
NG
B.O
NG
Do Not Cross
Do Not Cross





GOODNIGHT PUNPUN INIO ASANO
Part Four

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Yu Uehara
Takashi Kume

AHHHCHOO!!
ACHOO!
AH...
ACHOOO!
AH...!
ACHOO !!
AH...!
AHH ... CHOO!
ACHOO!
ACHOO!
ACHOO!

AH...
AH...
AH!
ACHOO!
ACHOO!
AH!
ACHOO!
WHOOSH
WH
HSOO
CREAK

INIO ASANO, a bona fide earthling, was born in Ibaraki, Japan, in 1980. In 2001, his short story "Uchu kara Konnichiwa" (Hello from Outer Space) won the first Sunday GX Rookie Prize. Later, GX published his series *Subarashi Sekai*, available in English from VIZ Media as *What a Wonderful World!* His other works include *Hikari no Machi* (City of Light), *Nijigahara Holograph* and *Umibe no Onna no Ko* (A Girl on the Shore), as well as *solanin*, also available from VIZ Media.

GOODNIGHT PUNPUN

Volume 2

VIZ Signature Edition

Story and Art by INIO ASANO

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by Inio ASANO
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